Outcomes and Theory of Quality Assurance
I. Introduction

In the Chilean case, universities are evaluated for accreditation through a process combining internal and external assessment in two mandatory areas, namely, institutional strategic management and management of undergraduate teaching. There are some optional specific areas that institutions may add to the accreditation process.

Decisions taken by the accrediting agency (CNAP) are contained in an accreditation resolution which includes observations on the institutional management and on the management of undergraduate teaching. These resolutions are accessible to the general public, and they provide valuable information on the manner in which the institutions are facing the management challenges posed by the current trends in contemporary higher education. The study assumed that there were a number of problem areas that were present in all the institutions as they were under the same pressures for change and adaptation.

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1 This paper is an outcome of a study sponsored by the Consejo Superior de Educación (the licensing institution for new universities in the Chilean system) that was carried out from April 2005 to March 2006, with the support of two professionals of said institution, Thomas Griggs who participated in the initial phase of the study, and Paula Mena who assisted for the rest of the project.

2 In the Chilean case, the pilot accreditation project implemented by the National Accreditation Commission (CNAP) with the Ministry of Education, and the support of the World Bank, carried out several rounds for institutional accreditation, that are open to autonomous higher education institutions.
II. Description of the study.

The study which is reported herein, is an analysis of the institutional management models prevailing in the universities that are members of the Council of University Rectors, which voluntarily submitted themselves to external evaluation in the first accreditation round opened by the CNAP. Such round comprised a wide array of autonomous higher education institutions, including two technical institutes which were not considered in the study. In the group of universities that participated in the first round, there were three private corporate institutions that were also excluded. The group of 13 universities selected for the study is made up of 7 that are State owned and 6 which are public non-State (including 4 Catholic universities and 2 regional public universities).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Accreditation Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universidad de Chile</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universidad de Concepción,</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universidad Austral de Chile</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universidad de Magallanes</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universidad de Talca</td>
<td>e</td>
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<tr>
<td>Universidad de Tarapacá</td>
<td>e</td>
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<tr>
<td>Universidad de la Frontera</td>
<td>e</td>
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<tr>
<td>Universidad de Santiago de Chile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Universidad de Valparaíso</td>
<td>e</td>
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<tr>
<td>Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universidad Católica del Maule</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* public, State owned (e); public non State (p)

Data came from two sources. The first one is the accreditation resolutions which are available in the Web site of the CNAP. The second source is the self evaluation reports prepared by the institutions as part of the accreditation process. These reports include a detailed section on institutional management which is highly valuable as it gives the views of the institution on its own management. Authorizations for accessing these reports were duly obtained for the study.

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3 There are 25 universities member of the Council. All of them are recipients of public funds that are distributed in the State budget, according to proportions that are historically fixed. In this group there are 16 State owned universities, 6 Catholic universities and 3 that are private, incorporated through acts of parliament.
The first step for the analysis was the identification of management problems as observed by the agency. According to CNAP criteria for institutional evaluation the following problem areas can be recognized:

(i) Maintenance of the institutional mission  
(ii) Development strategy  
(iii) Organizational structure  
(iv) Financial management  
(v) Information management  
(vi) Human resources management  
(vii) Quantitative growth  
(viii) Program management  
(ix) Management of off campus branches  
(x) Management of research and links with the external environment

For the purpose if the study these problem areas were formulated in terms of management demands. This means, for example, that the “maintenance of the mission” is formulated as the need to face this challenge from a managerial perspective. In other words, the question addressed to the data was about the presence of this need in the management model as a problem to be faced up. The assumption was that all management models in one way or another, deal with the problem areas mentioned above. The relevant point is to know whether the problem area is seen as a challenge that is still to be confronted in the managerial model.

The second step was to scrutinize the self evaluation reports from the point of view of criteria that would allow for identifying standard patterns in the management structures and processes. Results obtained through such scrutiny are reported in this presentation, according to the following criteria:  

(i) Formal rules vs. organizational culture  
(ii) Self regulation vs. external control

**III. Management problems observed by the accreditation agency.**

The accreditation resolutions issued by the CNAP indicate, for each institution under analysis, an explicit recognition of deficient aspects that must be faced by the institutions. The frequencies of these observations were tabulated according to the evaluation criteria of the agency. The results obtained are as follows:

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4 Two other criteria were considered in the study, but they are not included in this presentation as they have a mainly local character in the Chilean case. (centralization vs. decentralization; participation vs. effectiveness)
Table 2
Management problem areas observed by the CNAP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>RANKING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problems in defining, keeping up and revising the institutional mission</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak development strategy</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems in the organizational structure</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial management in deficit</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faulty management of information</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate management of human resources</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risky quantitative growth</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficient management of programs (undergraduate)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficient management of off campus branches</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficient management of research and/or links with the external environment</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Major problems in the institutional management

Frequency distribution in the table above shows 5 problems having a two-digit frequency. In general, these refer to processes that evolve slowly. In order of importance they are:

(i) Weak development strategy. These are problems related to the specification of long range ends for the institutional project. If these ends are specified, the problem is how they are translated into goals that can be reached in a measurable time. Institutions have made a substantial progress in identifying their strategic orientations, but is not at all clear that these orientations are effectively converted into plans that may actually guide the operation of strategic management.

(ii) Problems in the management of research. Research management presents some notorious problems. The first one is the capacity to grasp the opportunities that can propel the research process. The second one refers to the internal “effect” of links with the external environment. In this regard there is the need to handle in an adequate way the tension between the disciplines and the consultancies. Research management demands a clear view that may allow for distinguishing external contacts that foster the development of the disciplines, from those that are demands for technical assistance skills.
(iii) **Weak management of human resources.** This is another crucial problem area. Formation of the critical mass of academics demands a sustained efficiency in the design and implementation of the recruitment policy; in the mechanisms for the updating of teachers; and in the implementation of the disengagement policy required for the renewal of the academic staff. This is a generally mismanaged area in the universities under study. Another related aspect is the adoption of productivity incentives for managing human resources. In the case of universities it happens that, independently of amounts and modalities of such incentives, they become irrelevant at a certain level, given the weight of academic prestige.

(iv) **Weaknesses in the management of undergraduate programs.** This has a direct bearing in the quality of teaching but for the purposes of the study the relevant point is rather the manner in which programs are managed. Irrespective of selection policies that may vary in their rigor, young people do initiate in the university a formation process that will shape their lives for a number of years. It is difficult to find a university which is not addressing the subject of curricular innovation. However, in many cases this is a discourse which is incapable of working out effectively the fundamental link between curricular innovation that is declared, with the development of a long run process such as the formation of students.

(v) **Problems in the organizational structure.** To a great extent, the organizational structure is a reflection of the institutional culture. Problems in this area are generally related to the segmented participation of institutional actors. Participation grows and is sustained in strictly specific areas according to the composition of actors involved. Oftentimes in the design of university organizational structures, great importance is given to autonomy vis-à-vis the external milieu. However, much less importance is given to the creation of spaces for inward autonomy and to the relationship between autonomy and accountability, a key aspect in the universities under study which are recipients of public funding with a reasonable degree of transparency but without effective control over its use.

**b. Other problems in institutional management**

In the resolutions of the accrediting agency, there are also some observations on management that are less problematic in the universities under study. Nevertheless, these deserve a brief review for the analysis of institutional management.

In the first place there is the deficient management of information. This is somehow surprising given the substantial efforts made in the country for developing the information capacities and infrastructures in the universities. It appears though, that information is being produced mainly as a response to external requirements and seldom as a response to a genuine internal demand for information.
The keeping up and maintenance of the institutional mission is a lesser problem in this group of public universities. Although the discussion on the mission is relatively new in Latin American universities, public universities somehow have a clearer view concerning questions about their role in and their political link with society. They are institutions that do carry a certain dialogue with the State because of their financing. This dialogue promotes an institutional culture which is prone to raising questions about the commitment of the university with the nation.

Economic management appears as another area of secondary important. The relevant issue in this connection is not the sound management of financial flows, but rather the ways of managing public resources. Public universities are in principle committed to an education to serve and they usually do this in the formation of professionals. The crucial challenge for them is how to carry on the economic management of the institution in an environment that is being increasingly shaped by the rules of the market, particularly in the realm of the professions.

The management of off-campus branches is not observed as a problem area in the accreditation resolutions. Challenges stemming from the need to grow were originally identified as a problem area for the study, but it appears that the public universities under analysis, are at present in a state of relative stability as far as their size is concerned.

**IV. Management models and problems in the self-evaluation reports.**

The examination of the self evaluation reports submitted to the CNAP, following the two criteria mentioned above, allows for identifying management models as regards the internal regulatory processes, as indicated in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin of norms</th>
<th>Formal rules</th>
<th>Institutional culture</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Regulation</strong></td>
<td>Bureaucratic ritualism (I)</td>
<td>Ethos of recognition (II)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self Regulation</strong></td>
<td>Reflexive ritualism (III)</td>
<td>Ethos of vocation (IV)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**

*Institutional management: internal regulatory processes*
The table provides four models. The first model (I) combines external regulation with formal rules. In this case, external regulation refers to operational norms that are either dictated by public agents having jurisdictional power over the institutions or originate in a specific institutional environment (e.g. Church hierarchy in the case of Catholic universities). The model adds to these external norms the condition that they must be formalized in some regulation explicitly recognized in order to minimize the range of interpretation of rules. This model can be labeled as bureaucratic ritualism.

The second model (III) in the column of formal rules, combines normative formalization with rules originated through self regulation by following procedures that are legitimized inside the institution. This model can be designated as reflexive ritualism, where the adjective points to the self imposed character of the rules, as different from the other ritualistic model which is bureaucratic.

In the column embracing institutional culture, a model (II) can be worked out by a combination of the external character of the norm, with their insertion in the academic culture of the institution. External norms entering in this combination correspond to patterns of behavior that are dictated by external agents that lacking jurisdictional power, have influence in the inside of institutions (e.g. rules of the scientific community; standards accepted by peers). Whether these cultural norms be formalized or not, they have real validity in the academic life of the institutions. This model can be labeled as ethos of recognition.

The last model (IV) combines the institutional culture with norms that are originated inside the institutions through self regulation processes. In general rules that are internally generated and inserted in the institutional culture, refer to behavior patterns and practices linked to the values sustained by the university. Individual adhere to these rules insofar as they feel themselves vocationally inspired by the character of the university to which they pertain. For example, there are action codes valid in State universities which are adopted by their academics as they identify themselves with the civic values upheld by such institutions. This model can be labeled as ethos of vocation.

The four models coexist in the public universities under study. In each case, however, there is a particular normative equation according to the relative weight of each of the types of rules already described. This is a factor of high complexity for the performance of the academic managers.
V. Final remarks.

The major conclusion that can be obtained from the study, is that improvements to correct deficiencies observed in accreditation exercises can be made by different ways, according to the resulting management model that is actually followed by the institutions. These models cover a wide range that goes from the pole of formal bureaucratic rationalization (rules with detailed procedural information, operative manuals, statutory rules, formal bodies for interpreting rules) to the pole of institutional culture where norms are understood more as practices and habits collectively accepted as valid, than as formal rules.

In this light there is a lesson: it is imperative that the accreditation of institutions leave room for evaluating and recognizing different management models that may have the same effectiveness for facing and solving problems, but going through different roads. In the end, what really counts is that institutions may solve their managerial problems.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Outcomes and Theory of Quality Assurance (QA)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Institutional Audits: A comparison of the Experiences of Three South African Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenter</td>
<td>Jan Botha, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Judy Favish, University of Cape Town, South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sandra Stephenson, Rhodes University, South Africa</td>
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**Abstract:**

South Africa’s External Quality Assurance Agency, the HEQC (Higher Education Quality Committee), commenced its first cycle of institutional audits in 2004. During 2005, three public higher education institutions were audited, namely the University of Cape Town, the University of Stellenbosch, and Rhodes University. The process of preparing for and undergoing an external audit is being observed with great interest by the country’s higher education sector, particularly by those institutions still to be audited. In this paper, the authors aim to compare the three institutional contexts within which the audit preparations took place and to analyse the results of the internal feedback surveys as well as the recommendations contained in the HEQC’s audit reports, with particular reference to the goals of the HEQC’s audit framework. The paper concludes that, although each institution approached the audit in different, context-specific ways, the institutional experience of the audit process and its initial outcomes were remarkably similar.
1 Introduction

In terms of the South African Higher Education Act (101, 1997) the Council for Higher Education (CHE) was established in 2000. The Act stipulates that the CHE shall establish a standing Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), with the responsibility to promote quality assurance in higher education, to audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions (HEIs) and to accredit programmes of higher education. The HEQC was established in May 2001.

The quality assurance (QA) functions of the HEQC are performed within the broad legislative and policy context that shapes and regulates the provision of higher education in South Africa – in particular, the South African Qualifications Authority Act, the Higher Education Act as amended and White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education. The HEQC further operates within the policies and regulations of the Department of Education (DoE), including the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE). These policy documents summarise the main problems that characterised higher education under apartheid as follows:

- Historical inequality leading to unequal standards of provision across the higher education system;
- Lack of access to higher education for members of disadvantaged communities and skewed representivity of the student and staff profiles in comparison to the demographics of the country;
- Inefficiency and ineffectiveness – high failure and drop-out rates, especially for Black Students and unacceptably long periods taken to complete degrees;
- Irrelevance of the content of many programmes for the South African and broader African context; and
- Inadequate research productivity

Quality Assurance was identified as one of three instruments introduced by the post-apartheid state to steer the higher education system towards addressing these problems. The other two involved the introduction of a new funding framework which directed funding towards the attainment of key goals in the NPHE and the use of three-year rolling plans submitted by institutions to determine the government subsidy to institutions.

In its first public document, the Founding Document (2001), the HEQC outlined the following understanding of quality:

- Quality as ‘fitness for purpose’ in relation to specified mission within a national framework that encompasses differentiation and diversity
- Quality as ‘value for money’ judged in relation to the full range of higher education purposes set out in the White Paper
- Quality as ‘transformation’ in the sense of developing the capabilities of individual learners for personal enrichment, as well as the requirements of social development and economic and employment growth
• Quality as ‘fitness of purpose’ which locates the above 3 criteria within a framework based on national goals, priorities and targets (Council for Higher Education, 2001: 14).

In line with this definition of quality the HEQC generated criteria for conducting audits which reflected considerable congruency with international goals for external quality audits but also included some distinctive features. Brennan and Shah (2000) have defined the common purposes at international level as being

• To ensure accountability for the use of public funds;
• To improve the development, maintenance and enhancement of quality in education provision;
• To inform students, employers and the public at large about the quality of provision; and
• To undertake a quality check on new (and often for-profit) institutions

The distinctive features of the South African national quality assurance system relate to the explicit alignment with transformation objectives. “From the outset, the rationale and objectives for QA were already uniquely tied to the post-transition project of large-scale social and economic reconstruction and to an explicit transformation agenda in higher education” (Singh and Naidoo, quoted in Luckett, 2006: 32). In its 2004 Framework for Institutional Audits document, the HEQC states that “specific quality-related goals facing the South African higher education sector include increased access and equity opportunities for previously marginalised groups, especially women and black students and staff...” (CHE, 2004).

Hence the QA system in SA has been described as a ‘mixed model’ designed to meet the particular South African context and its transformation imperative combining a concern to promote improvement and development with an accountability check on the extent to which institutions’ quality management systems enable the institutions to meet national goals for the transformation of higher education (Luckett, 2006: 30).

As a result, accountability and development are conceptualised by the HEQC board as “two necessary and important imperatives that must be pursued simultaneously and kept in balance” (quoted by Luckett, 2006:31).

The first six-year cycle, during which all 21 public higher education institutions will be audited, began with the audit of the Central University of Technology in 2004, followed in 2005 by the University of Cape Town (UCT), Rhodes University (RU) and the University of Stellenbosch (US).

The process involves each institution conducting a comprehensive self-evaluation and responding to 19 HEQC audit criteria. An audit portfolio (or self-evaluation report) is produced by the institution and extensively discussed by an external panel of peers, followed by a week-long visit to the campus when a diverse group of staff, students and wider community representatives are interviewed by the audit panel. A draft audit report is produced within a few months of the visit for the audited institution to comment on factual inaccuracies, followed by a final audit report containing commendations and recommendations. An executive summary of each audit report is made publicly available
on the HEQC’s website, and each institution is required to provide an improvement plan to the HEQC, responding to the recommendations in final audit report, within five months of the publication of the report.

In this article the authors describe how three institutions (UCT, RU and US) mediated the HEQC’s goals and criteria for institutional audits in their approaches to preparing the self-evaluation portfolios; consider the results of the surveys conducted to gather feedback from the interviewees on the audit process; and analyse the extent to which the structure of the audit visits and the recommendations contained in the final audit reports reflect the twin purposes of the audit within the South African context, namely the fit between quality management systems and institutional missions (fitness for purpose) and alignment with national goals for transformation of higher education (fitness of purpose).

2 Audit of the University of Cape Town

2.1 The vision and mission of the University of Cape Town

The University of Cape Town (UCT) was formally established in 1918. UCT is a medium-sized contact English-medium public university with an enrolment in 2004 of about 22 300 students. Approximately 30 percent of UCT’s students are enrolled for postgraduate degrees.

The mission of UCT is “to be an outstanding teaching and research university, educating for life and addressing the challenges facing our society. “Educating for life means” that the institution’s educational process must provide

- “a foundation of skills, knowledge and versatility that will last a life-time, despite a changing environment;
- research-based teaching and learning;
- critical enquiry in the form of the search for new knowledge and better understanding; and
- an active developmental role in our cultural, economic, political, scientific and social environment.”

2.2 Institutional framework for audit

In May 2004 UCT was informed that it would be audited in May 2005. UCT established an Institutional Audit Steering Committee (IASC) in June 2004 to guide and oversee the preparations for the audit. In developing its approach to the audit, the leadership was mindful of the fact that as a public institution UCT was accountable for addressing the national goals for the transformation of higher education and that the university would need to demonstrate how its quality management systems were geared to enabling the institution to align its plans with national goals. Given that the external quality assurance mechanisms were established to help steer change in the higher education system, the institution recognized that it would need to provide evidence of how it was addressing national goals. However, the leadership was also mindful of concerns that many academics would likely have about possible violations of institutional autonomy and that
it would be necessary to manage the conversations in the institution about public accountability and the audit very strategically.

A review of the international literature (Dill 2000, Carrol 2003, Harvey and Newton 2004) on the experience of external audits had demonstrated that while regulation is a necessary condition for quality enhancement, it is not sufficient. An improvement oriented approach to quality assurance necessitates an assessment of the capacity of the institution to manage and improve its own processes.

With due consideration to the factors outlined above UCT’s approach to the audit involved setting desired institutional outcomes and principles to guide the preparations for the audit in order to locate the audit in ongoing efforts to promote a culture of continuous improvement. The outcomes and principles were endorsed by the Council and Senate Executive Committees. In this way the agents responsible for preparing for the audit, (the DVC Planning, the Director: Institutional Planning, and the Institutional Audit Steering Committee) mediated the institutional engagement with the HEQC.

**Summary of UCT’s Proposed Outcomes for the Audit**
1. A description, analysis and evaluation, supported by evidence, of the manner in which the institution assures the quality of its core academic activities within the specified scope of the audit.
2. Greater awareness within UCT of the various elements of a quality management system
4. Identification of quality related challenges.

**Summary of Guiding Principles established for preparing for UCT’s Audit**
- Executive responsibility and ownership of the process
- Honesty
- Maximising the opportunity for critical reflection and identification of improvements
- Providing space for different voices and constituencies to express their views, taking redress and equity into consideration
- The need for evidence based conclusions
- A commitment to ensuring that the process was not too burdensome for academics
- Involvement of relevant staff in the work of the task teams

2.3 The self-evaluation process

**Building ownership of the audit portfolio**
Dill and others have described how external Quality Agencies can “act as catalysts for change in that they help initiate or bolster development of quality assurance systems within institutions…, reinforce efforts to develop institution-wide ‘quality cultures’… and offer visible confirmation to the public that attention is being paid to quality assurance” (Dill 2000:203) but that “successful implementation of audit requires a design and development process that actively considers the view of faculty members and develops over the time institutional trust in the integrity of the process” (Dill 2000:191).
Much research on the impact of audits indicates that their success depends on the extent to which key internal constituencies ‘buy into’ the process and become committed to engaging with the outcomes of the self-evaluation and audit. “The success of a system may be dependent less on the rigour of application, than on its contingent use of actors and interest groups” (Harvey and Newton 2004:155).

UCT identified particular constituencies, such as the executive, the unions, the Academic Association, the Black Caucus, the student representative council, student faculty councils and heads of academic departments as key actors in any efforts to promote a culture of continuous improvement within UCT and help attain the transformation purposes and objectives for higher education outlined above. Considerable energy was devoted to informing these constituencies about the audit and in eliciting their input at various stages in the process of preparing for the audit. The thrust of these presentations was to promote the value of critical self-reflection in continuous efforts to strengthen the organisation.

The desire to nurture trust in the integrity of the process led to the decision to use non-faculty based administrative and Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) staff to do the bulk of the preparatory work, without compromising on the evidence-based approach to compiling situational reports for each of the criteria. This was achieved through involving the faculty office managers in the process of collecting documentation on policies, systems and procedures in the faculties.

The first phase of the preparations involved the collection of evidence related to a set of evaluative questions developed by the Institutional Audit Steering Committee (IASC) - Twelve task teams were set up to assist with the collection of evidence and the compilation of reports to enable the self-evaluation. The conveners of the task teams met once a month during the period of preparing for the audit. Sixty-two people participated in the task teams of whom only 17 were academics. Task teams were given the task of describing the “as is” situation in terms of the following questions:

1. What are we trying to do?
2. Why are we trying to do it?
3. How are we trying to do it?
4. Why are we doing it in that way?
5. How effectively has it been done?
6. How do we know?
7. Any plans for improvement, where needed?

Given the HEQC’s intention to use audits was on assessing UCT’s responsiveness to the local, national and international contexts and on the extent to which UCT quality management systems were geared to the attainment of the transformation purposes and objectives for higher education, the Institutional Audit Steering Committee decided to approach social responsiveness and transformation as cross cutting themes to be addressed by all the task teams. The Transformation officer was co-opted onto the Conveners committee to provide a conceptual framework on transformation for evaluating the institution’s performance in relation to each of the criteria from a transformation perspective.
To promote ownership of the process by the academic sector, a workshop was held with academic heads of department to obtain their comments on the situational analysis reports, identify the strengths and weaknesses in UCT’s quality management system (QMS) and engage with the HEQC’s open-ended questions. Attempts were also made to invite all academics and the various constituencies that form part of the Institutional Forum, including the black staff association and the trade unions, to provide their views of the strengths and weaknesses of UCT and to comment on the draft situational analysis reports. A workshop was held with the Senior Leadership Group, consisting of the Executive, Deans and Executive Directors to comment on a first draft of the portfolio. The revised draft was submitted to Senate and the Institutional Forum for comments.

Building ownership amongst the student sector

In an attempt to ensure that students’ perspectives on the quality of UCT’s core academic processes were reflected in the audit portfolio, discussions were held with representatives of the Student Representative Council (SRC) throughout the process and the SRC was encouraged to provide formal responses to the draft portfolio. However, due to the timing of the submission of the audit portfolio (overlapping with end-of-year exams and summer holidays), it was not possible to obtain student feedback prior to the institutional submission. Hence special permission was obtained from the HEQC for the students to submit a separate portfolio based on inputs received from the faculty councils, the SRC, the residence sector, and the Black Law Students Society.

2.4 Preparation for the site visit

Several weeks prior to the site visit the HEQC sent a proposed schedule for the interviewees.

Analysis of the schedule indicated the HEQC’s intention to use the site visit to interview a wide range of constituencies, including marginalized constituencies and structures explicitly involved in promoting transformation, for the purposes of triangulation.

The schedule included slots with people who had held specific portfolios in the institution related to academic planning, planning and budgeting quality assurance, student and staff development, student support, research development and innovation, managers, and ordinary academic staff. Ten of the 54 interview slots were devoted to interviews with transformation related structures based on inputs received from the faculty councils, the SRC, the residence sector, and the Black Law Students Society. Representatives from disadvantaged communities in the Cape Town area were also invited to be interviewed. In accordance with the HEQC’s request due consideration was given to issues of representivity, in terms of race and gender, in drawing up the lists of the rest of the interviewees.

Each interviewee received a personal letter of invitation signed by the DVC providing background on the audit’s objectives. The letter from the DVC stressed that interviewees should feel free to openly express their opinions and engage with the panelists in a robust fashion. In order to avoid conveying an impression that UCT leadership wanted to
influence the manner in which people engaged with the panel, no formal briefing of interviewees was organized. Interviewees were also provided with copies of the Executive Summary and the List of Areas for Improvement contained in UCT’s Self-evaluation report.

Interviewees were debriefed informally by members of the Institutional Planning Department after their interviews. They were invited to express their opinions of the interview and to provide information on the line of questioning. Analysis of the responses indicated that the focus of the questions in the first two days was overwhelmingly on issues related to transformation and social responsiveness and on how the allocation of resources within the institution supported transformation and other institutional strategic imperatives. However questions related to the manner in which the needs of previously disadvantaged groups were being identified and addressed were raised in most of the interviews.

2.5 Results of the survey of the experiences of participants during the UCT audit

After the audit visit a questionnaire was distributed to IASC task team members and internal members of staff who participated in the interviews with the external panel. A total of 258 questionnaires were sent out. 45 responses were received. This amounts to a 17% response rate. Whilst the response rate was low it was representative of the various categories of people who participated in the process namely, members of task teams, interviewees during the audit visit, students, Deans, Professors, lecturers, senior lecturers, lecturers, HODs, Deputy Deans, and several members of constituency based organisations at UCT.

Respondents indicated that there was an appropriate level of engagement across the institution to lay the foundations for ownership of the portfolio and preparing for the next phase of the audit.

The findings of the evaluation of the audit process are summarised below in relation to the desired outcomes which UCT had set for itself for the audit (see par 2.2.3).

Critical reflection on UCT’s Quality Management Systems

- 57% of the respondents felt that the internal process of preparing for audit was useful because it promoted reflective practices within the institution and promoted a common understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of UCT’s current Quality Management Systems.

- 9% disagreed and 27% said that they weren’t sure. They felt that the full impact of the audit would only become apparent after the improvement plan was developed and implemented.

- 57% of the respondents also felt that the HEQC criteria allowed for sufficient flexibility for institutions to use these in ways that made sense for them.

Promotion of greater awareness of the various elements of a quality management system and their effectiveness
Respondents indicated that the processes of preparing for the audit contributed to increased institutional transparency and raised awareness of quality and quality enhancement. Some views of respondents are captured below.

- **Reading through self assessment resulted in a better perspective of major issues UCT is grappling with and a clearer view how my own efforts are impacting on these issues.**
- **Awareness of what other Faculties are involved in with regards our field of work and a greater understanding of the UCT procedures and the institution as a whole.**
- **Getting an understanding of how other parts of the university work and the way in which it ought to come together thus manifesting an institutional character and culture.**
- **To some extent the process of explication of the kinds of systems we use has helped to clarify things. Knowing that the audit was coming down on us also meant that we moved towards a greater sensitivity towards a need to be transparent (and thereby accountable).**

These findings are significant because as Dill suggests, it is “unwise to assume that academics, whether auditors or audited, have a clear conception of what constitutes academic quality assurance processes” (Dill 2000:194).

**Assessment of the audit visit**

The visit of the HEQC panel took place from 16 – 20 May 2005. During the week approximately 450 people were interviewed in 54 slots.

Generally respondents rated the value of the audit visit process lower than that of the internal audit preparation process. 38% of respondents felt that the interviews by HEQC panelists added value to UCT’s own self-evaluation exercise, 29% were not sure and 27% disagreed.

The findings of the survey of the audit process contained mixed views about the value of the external panel. Most of the negative perceptions of the audit visit related to the shortness of the interviews and the perceived bias of some of the panelists which militated against meaningful engagement.

- **The interviews were very short with several people to be interviewed, and several people on the panel. It seemed a very superficial process.**
- **The interviews were very fragmented.**
- **I felt that the panel was interested in what we had to say but also it seemed partly as if they had made up their own views on UCT’s profile. Their own obsessions and assumptions were also occasionally evident.**
- **The actual interviews should be reviewed as most staff felt that there was little engagement with the panel. Perhaps the first couple of days should be used for triangulation and the last couple of days should be used to for more engagement around issues identified in the portfolio to enable the panel to generate appropriate and meaningful recommendations and add value to internal discussions.**

These views resonate with concerns about a “new regime of ‘truth’ about the claims that externality promises a measure of independence and objectivity that is seen to enhance
quality and professionalism” (Blackmore 2004:386). The over-reliance on peer review as a method for conducting quality assurance has been challenged by some writers on the grounds of the subjectivity of peers in a competitive market-based and hierarchical system (see Blackmore, 2004 and Harvey and Newton, 2004). Similar concerns surfaced during the UCT audit.

Other respondents felt that meshing internal processes with external peer reviews lends more credibility to internal reflective processes and helps to add weight to the importance of actually addressing acknowledged weaknesses. Significantly the interviews were experienced positively where they were perceived as adding value to internal members’ understanding of particular issues and challenges facing UCT through the asking of pertinent and incisive questions.

Assessing the value or impact of the exercise

Whilst the evaluation results suggests that UCT was successful in building ownership of the self-review process and product, concerns remain about the overall impact that the audit will have on the quality of core processes and the student experience. According to Harvey and Newton (2004) the notion of “value-added” should be at the core of any improvement-oriented, value for money and transformative approach to quality by an external Quality Agency.

The majority of those who responded to the questionnaire (and those who participated in a subsequent staff colloquium) on the audit process agreed that the internal self-evaluation process to prepare for audit was beneficial. Respondents were less convinced about the value of the HEQC site-visit, although the majority supported in principle the idea of external validation and the requirement for public accountability.

3 Audit of Rhodes University

3.1 The vision and mission of Rhodes University

Rhodes is the smallest university in South Africa, with approximately 6000 students and 330 academic staff. Established in 1904, it is a predominantly residential university situated in an attractive country town. The University has the reputation of being a well-established liberal arts institution with strong humanities, science, law, education, commerce and pharmacy faculties. Approximately 20% of the students are postgraduate and 25% are international.

Rhodes University aims to:

• Produce outstanding, internationally recognised graduates who are innovative, analytical, articulate, and adaptable and who have sound moral values and a sense of civic responsibility
• Provide an attractive, safe and well-equipped environment that is conducive to good scholarship and collegiality and which encourages students to reach their full potential
• Contribute to the advancement of scholarship internationally and to the development of the Eastern Cape and South Africa
• Affirm its African identity, reject all forms of unfair discrimination and create an institutional culture which is inclusive and enriching for staff, students and the wider community
• Advance the economic, social, educational and cultural well-being of the institution and its wider community.

3.2 Institutional framework for audit

The University’s approach to the audit was conceptualised as improvement-oriented, student-focused and an opportunity to link QA to planning and resource allocation. In addition, an attempt was made to use the process to allocate responsibility to specific individuals or committees for improvement action. The University expected from the HEQC, external validation of its achievements as well as guidance on improvement strategies, and sought external comment on its particular niche area, the student experience.

Given that only 2 of the HEQC’s 19 audit criteria relate to fitness of purpose, the University concentrated on fitness for purpose and did not conceptualise the audit as predominantly focused on transformation imperatives, but rather as an opportunity to

• generate discussion about the meaning and relevance of quality and quality assurance within the institution
• constructively reflect on the effectiveness of the institution’s quality assurance systems
• Identify areas of strength and acknowledge achievements
• Identify areas needing improvement, and allocate responsibility for improvement to appropriate individuals or committees.

Discussions around the self-evaluation process for the HEQC audit began in 2003 during the planning phase of the institution’s internal academic review exercise. The Senate decided that, in line with the University’s holistic approach to quality assurance, the next review of academic departments, due to be held in early 2005, could also be used to provide the information required for the institutional self-evaluation and thereby lessen the reporting burden on academics. Through this synchronisation of the internal and external processes the University aimed to ensure that the views of academic staff would be considered and their trust in the process built – an important lesson learnt from experiences elsewhere reported by Dill (2000:191) and confirmed by the University’s 2005 Academic Review Report which recorded academic dissatisfaction with what some perceived as ‘creeping managerialism’ and indicated that Rhodes University wished to avoid a ‘tick box mentality and total quality management route’ (RU Academic Review Report, 2005).

To facilitate the synchronisation of internal review and external audit, the HEQC agreed to the University’s request to schedule the audit visit for September 2005.

The audit process was facilitated by the Vice-Chancellor in conjunction with the Academic Planning and QA Office. The Academic Planning and Staffing Committee, a joint Council and Senate committee, drove the academic review process (the major part of the self-evaluation) whilst a sub-committee of the Quality Assurance Committee, the
Audit Portfolio Committee, was established to produce the Audit Portfolio. The Audit Portfolio Committee was chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and included deans, students and staff union representatives. The Vice-Chancellor, the Director of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance and the members of the Audit Portfolio Committee were therefore the mediating agents between the HEQC and the institution.

3.3 Preparation for the site visit

Since an orientation toward academic quality assurance processes cannot be assumed among members of the academic community (Dill 2000:195) and given the newness of the HEQC audit process, all interviewees were invited to attend a briefing meeting held the week before the audit visit to outline the national QA framework and the purpose of the audit and to encourage participants to respond honestly in the interests of transparency and improvement. A specific information and discussion session was held with the SRC executive to encourage student participation in the process. In addition, the Director AP&QA as well as the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor attended faculty meetings to discuss expectations and answer questions.

A proposed interview schedule was prepared by the HEQC and sent to the University approximately two weeks prior to the audit visit.

Interviewees were selected by the chairs of the relevant committees or the by most senior person in each area. For example, researchers to be interviewed were identified by the Dean of Research, and union members by the executive of the union concerned. Care was taken to ensure the interviewees selected represented the categories stipulated by the HEQC.

The HEQC’s document ‘Criteria for Institutional Audits’ (CHE, June 2004) notes that two broad areas form the focus of the audit evaluation: Area 1, covering the mission of the institution and links between planning, resource allocation and quality management; and Area 2, covering teaching and learning, research and community engagement. Accordingly, the audit schedule indicated that the first two days of the audit visit would be focused on interviewing members of university governance structures, particularly those responsible for planning, resource allocation, quality assurance, equity, academic development, internationalisation, service learning and community engagement. Members of Council, the SRC, staff unions and the Institutional Forum were also interviewed in this initial phase. From day three, the Panel’s focus moved to Area 2: secondary levels of governance and interviews with groups representing specific categories, for example student interviewees were categorized by the HEQC as South African Black, African foreign Black, international, residential and non-residential, and researchers as Black, female, young, new and ‘seasoned’.

Interviewees were informed of the category they were representing and this led to some objections, with one staff member sending a written response to the invitation thus:

- “Concerning your letter about the interview I am rather uneasy about my category "Black researchers". I conduct and direct research because of my interest in research. The issue of race either of myself or my collaborators has never been an issue.”
A further comment, however, indicates that some staff accepted the need to categorise interviewees according to selected demographics:

- “I was uncomfortable about my participation in the interviews as a “female”, but I can see why this was done.”

During the early stages of the audit visit, several participants raised concerns with the mediators (the Vice-Chancellor and the Director of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance) about the perceived dominance of transformation issues as well as the pre-interview briefing given to interviewees by the Panel Chair where interviewees were informed that the interview would be a ‘one-way process’ and they should not follow-up on their responses or ask questions of the panel. The mediators raised these concerns with the Panel Chair and the HEQC’s Executive Director at the end of day two, and interviewees reported a more collegial atmosphere from the third day of the site visit.

Some participants expressed their frustration regarding the site visit in their responses to an open question about expectations which was included in the post-audit survey:

- “The interviews were too short so an accurate & detailed account of the Rhodes overall quality could not be provided. Interviewers seemed to be looking for Rhodes’ weak points.”
- “I found the interviewer was not open-minded to the responses given.”
- “…too rushed and rather superficial; very little in-depth questioning, understanding & discussion”
- “I felt the Panel had already made judgements about the University and were merely seeking confirmation of their pre-conceived conclusions.”

However, other responses were more positive such as

- “the HEQC panel was professional, asked pointed rather than vague questions”
- “The chair was charming and courteous. The interviews were challenging and insightful”
- “It was interesting to note how the interview progressed from our specific criteria to general comments about Rhodes University. It allowed all concerns and praises to be voiced”
- “The interview was helpful in making me realise some of Rhodes’ good points and bad points.”

3.4 Results of the survey of the experiences of participants during the Rhodes audit

A questionnaire was sent out to all interviewees 6 weeks after the audit visit, based closely on the questionnaire used following the Stellenbosch audit. A 41% response rate was obtained. Respondents were anonymous, but were asked to indicate whether they were interviewed as academic staff, support staff, students or external participants. In addition to 15 closed questions, which were rated on a 5-point Likert Scale, respondents were asked to answer one open-ended question:
“In retrospect, how did you experience the HEQC audit process (self-evaluation, development of the audit portfolio, briefing, panel interview and post-audit feedback)? Did the process meet your expectations? (Please be specific, providing examples if possible)"

The responses to the open ended questions were classified as positive, negative or mixed. Of those who chose to answer this question, 88% indicated that their experience of the HEQC audit process was generally positive.

Regarding the 15 focused questions, the consistent overall opinion was that the HEQC audit achieved what it set out to achieve:

- 90% of the respondents indicated that the questions asked during the interviews were related to the Audit criteria.
- 84% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the panel listened with an open mind to the responses to their questions.
- Only 4% felt the tone of the questions was negative towards Rhodes University.
- Only 2% indicated that the audit panel was ill-prepared for the interviews, with 90% believing the panel was well-prepared, and 8% neutral.

A significant proportion of respondents, 46%, supported the perception of the audit visit being dominated by transformation issues, while 29% disagreed and 25% were neutral.

76% of respondents thought that the interviews were focused on quality assurance issues, 20% were neutral and only 3% disagreed

24% got the impression that the audit was focused on accountability. 43% were neutral and 30% felt it was more focused on improvement.

While a majority of respondents, 75%, were positive that the audit process will help the University improve its quality, only 50% agreed that the interviews provided insight into how the University can improve its quality.

The experience of the majority of participants is perhaps summed up in the following comments:

- “The interviews were pleasant and interesting, but not terribly beneficial or transformative”

- “The audit visit seemed more focused on accountability whilst the wider process was more focused on improvement... Days 3-5 were much better (more collegial and constructive) than days 1-2.”

These findings support international conclusions that internal self-evaluation is of more benefit to the institution than the actual audit visit, as described by Carr et al (2005) following investigations into the influence of external quality audit on university performance in New Zealand.

In hindsight, the difficulties experienced during the first two days of the Rhodes University audit visit could have been avoided or minimized if the mediators had explicitly conveyed to the university community, both in the audit portfolio and in the
internal briefing session, the close link between the achievement of quality and national transformation objectives.

4 Audit of the University of Stellenbosch

4.1 The vision and mission of the University of Stellenbosch

The University of Stellenbosch is a medium-sized, full-breadth and research-intensive university with all the advantages of a classic university town. It was established in 1916. In 2004 it had 22,400 students with over 30 percent of its enrolments at the postgraduate level. Building on its Strategic Framework its *Vision 2012* statement (adopted in 2003) envisions the University of Stellenbosch as

- an academic institution of excellence and a respected knowledge partner
- contributing towards building the scientific, technological, and intellectual capacity of Africa
- an active role-player in the development of South African society
- having a campus culture that welcomes a diversity of people and ideas
- promoting Afrikaans as a language of teaching and science in a multilingual context.

With this vision statement the University of Stellenbosch signalled its commitment to transformation and it is also used as the transformation roadmap. The five dimensions are to be read together and not in isolation. As of 2004 this vision has been embedded in the University’s planning and management processes, including the development of objectives and strategic management indicators at various levels in the institution.

Since 2000 Stellenbosch has been going through an era of rapid and deep transformation. When the HEQC indicated in May 2004 its intention to audit Stellenbosch during 2005, this transformation process was already taking place, including a concerted drive to change the staff and student profile and to change the institutional culture, accompanied and supported by a comprehensive process of rightsizing and restructuring of academic and other units. Transformation at Stellenbosch was therefore not prompted by the prospect of an HEQC audit. With hindsight it seems that it would have been better to postpone the audit until the rightsizing and restructuring processes were completed. Nevertheless, Stellenbosch agreed to be audited while the restructuring was taking place. The scope of the audit as defined in the HEQC audit framework and criteria was accepted and no additional issues were added.

4.2 Institutional framework for the audit

When the audit was announced, the Stellenbosch’s leadership communicated its approach and purposes for the audit to the university community, namely
that Stellenbosch sees the audit as one of the building blocks of a larger process which may enable the university to apply for self-accreditation status.\footnote{Higher education institutions can apply for and be granted self-accreditation status for a period of six years after an HEQC evaluation has found that the institution satisfies its audit requirements, successfully manages internal and external programme evaluations, and satisfies other quality-related requirements of the Department of Education and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Self-accreditation status will enable institutions to accredit all existing programmes where no other Education and Training Quality Assurance body (ETQA) has a formal interest (cf. HEQC 2004:4).} By highlighting the possibility of the achievement of self-accreditation status, the university’s leadership indicated that the incentive for participation is the attraction to achieve this status rather than a threat of possible punitive measures should the audit process result in a less favourable report;

- that Stellenbosch considers quality assurance, and therefore specifically also the audit, to be one of the instruments for transformation and institutional renewal and

- that Stellenbosch expects the audit process to be an institutional learning opportunity.

The second purpose indicates that transformation was from the outset explicitly built into the audit preparation process. It is important to note, however, that transformation in this context was oriented primarily at institutional goals such as organisational restructuring to improve academic performance, cost-effectiveness, and academic management at departmental level. On the other hand, these institutional goals were also strongly informed by the broader aim of enhancing institutional alignment with the national goals for higher education, in particular to change the diversity profile of the students and staff.

Since the responsibility for the governance of the institutional audit process is included in the remit of the Quality Committee, a standing joint committee of Senate and Council, no other special steering mechanism was set up for the audit. The executive responsibility for the process was allocated to the office of the Vice-Rector (Teaching) while the Director Academic Planning and Quality Assurance carried the responsibilities to lead the self-evaluation process (at conceptual and operational levels), to develop the self-evaluation report and to arrange the site visit. It expected of these officials and committees to mediate the transformational purposes of the national audit framework within the institution.

4.3 The self-evaluation process and report

In preparation for an external audit many institutions appoint a number of task teams (consisting of a mix of academic, professional and administrative staff) to conduct the self-evaluation process. The importance of the involvement of academic staff to the successful implementation of audits has been attested through the experiences elsewhere in the world (Dill 2000:191). However, for a number of reasons the institutional leadership decided not to follow such an approach at Stellenbosch. Due to the fact that the institutional rightsizing and academic restructuring processes were taking place simultaneously with the audit preparation, it was deemed desirable to spare academics as far as possible from the work required by the self-evaluation process. “The audit...
combined with restructuring came at a bad time,” commented one of the interviewees after the audit visit. The fact that these processes were conducted simultaneously had the effect that the rightsizing and restructuring processes enjoyed priority over the self-evaluation process.

The staff of the quality unit prepared a draft of the Self Evaluation Report and used this as the basis to obtain inputs and comments from the members of the executive leadership and the heads of a number of relevant support units. Since these staff members were well aware of the transformation emphasis of the audit as a whole, many comments were about transformation issues. Furthermore, the Vice Chancellor wrote a fairly long preface to the report explaining how Stellenbosch was responding to national transformation goals. This preface embodied one of the strongest expressions of the transformational activities of Stellenbosch at that stage.

The draft report - with the VC’s Preface - was sent to the deans of the faculties, the chairpersons of staff and student organisations, and the heads of the support units with the following requests:

- to verify the information in the draft SER,
- to identify and formulate specific strengths and areas for improvement “against the background of the HEQC audit criteria”,
- to propose action plans to attend to the areas identified for improvement, and
- to formulate responses to the four open questions posed by the HEQC.

Through these requests the quality unit mediated and communicated the transformation expectations of the HEQC in the institution (as embodied in the audit criteria).

Since there were opportunities for inputs and comments from various leaders and groups and since the University’s formal consultation and decision-making bodies were involved in the development and approval of the final report, the SER did enjoy some level of ownership, although it would have been better if larger numbers of academic staff members were involved in the initial phases of the self-evaluation process.

4.4 Preparation for the site visit

To enhance student participation in and awareness of the audit the Director Academic Planning accompanied by the Dean of Students conducted a range of meetings with student groups, including meetings in all the residences.

In terms of standard practice the HEQC’s director of audits visited Stellenbosch before the audit visit to communicate and explain the audit visit programme. This pre-audit visit took place only one week after the completion of the audit visit to Rhodes University. With the experiences of that visit fresh in mind, the HEQC’s official strongly emphasized that the first two days of the audit visit will focus almost exclusively on transformation issues.

In an endeavour to overcome the limited involvement of academics in the self-evaluation process, the University’s quality unit made a special effort to enhance ownership through a range of briefing sessions which were attended by more than 80% of the interviewees. During these sessions the focus of the audit on transformation was communicated. The
interviewees were therefore not surprised by the emphasis on transformation, especially during the first two days of the audit visit.

The audit programme reflected the HEQC’s emphasis on transformation issues. It included a request for interviews with black and women academics, researchers and students in addition to interviews to interrogate the (more operational) quality arrangements of the institution. Furthermore, specific interviews were requested with members of the Employment Equity Forum, the Appointments Committee, and individuals involved in the various structures responsible for enrolment planning, throughput and support. Care was taken to ensure gender and race representation in all the groups of interviewees.

4.5 Perceptions of interviewees

Interviewees were requested to complete a paper-based questionnaire during a debriefing session directly after each interview and to participate in a facilitated reflection on each interview. A total of 499 responses were received and analysed. Respondents were invited to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with statements on the panel interview and other issues pertaining to the HEQC audit as a whole.

In their responses to the statement, *The Panel’s questions were related to the HEQC’s Audit criteria*, 92% of the interviewees indicated that they agree, 5% gave a neutral response and 3% disagreed. This indicates that the interviewees were satisfied that the panel did not act outside the agreed upon framework (“*The Panel asked difficult but fair questions*” commented one interviewee), taking into account that the questioning (especially during the first two days) was focused on issues of transformation. Consider the following comments from interviewees:

- “The Panel focused on transformation and the success of black students”
- “There was a general concern for student well-being and transformation”

In their response to the question, *The Panel listened with an open mind to the responses to their questions*, 92% of the interviewees agreed, 6% were neutral and 2% disagreed. This is an indication that interviewees were mostly satisfied that the HEQC audit panels were not prejudiced.

The percentage of interviewees that agreed with the statement *The general tone of questions was not negative towards the University*, is slightly lower than the response to the previous statement: 86%, with 10% indicating that they were not sure whether they agree or disagree while 4% of the interviewees experienced the tone of the questioning as negative. In the open feedback a some of the interviewees expressed their dissatisfaction with the tone of the questioning during some of the interviews. Although not widespread, it did happen that some panel members apparently overstepped the boundaries of collegial style within which the audits are conducted.

In response to the statement, *the Panel took the University’s own goals seriously*, 80% agreed, 16% were neutral and 4% disagreed. These responses confirm that the ‘fitness for purpose’ definition of quality did play a role in the questions of the HEQC panel.

In response to the statement, *The interviews provided insight into how the University can improve its quality*, only 58% agreed, with 29% neutral and 13% indicating
disagreement. It is significant that the agree percentage to this question is much lower than the responses to the other statements in the survey. The interviews conducted during the site visit clearly have a limited value for quality improvement. On the other hand, in the response to the statement, “This HEQC Audit will help the University to improve its quality”, 76% indicated that they agree with 21% neutral and 3% indicating disagreement. The responses to these two statements are similar to the experience at UCT and Rhodes University: the audit process as a whole (including the self-evaluation) is considered to be more valuable for quality improvement than the audit visit and the interviews. Consider, for example, the following responses of interviewees

- “The session was too short for detailed discussion of questions. Perhaps smaller groups/ more time for interviews. Or fewer questions”
- “The fragmented manner in which information was provided during interviews may create the wrong impression”

Given the manner in which the Stellenbosch Self Evaluation Report was developed, it is not surprising that only 69% of the interviewees agreed with the statement, “The University’s Self Evaluation Report gives an accurate representation of the university’s quality arrangements” (22% neutral and 9% disagreed). The decision of the management of the University of Stellenbosch to limit the involvement of academic staff members may well have led to the fact that there was a lower percentage of the Stellenbosch than Rhodes University interviewees who considered the SER as an accurate representation of the quality arrangements of the respective universities. Another explanation is that there may possibly have been quite a number of interviewees who did not agree with the manner in which the Vice-Chancellor expressed strong social transformational issues in the preface which he wrote in his personal capacity.

5 The Audit Reports: Analysis of the categories of recommendations

A comparison of the studies of Wahlén (2004), Meade & Woodhouse (2000), Dill (2000), Stensaker (2003) and Harvey & Newton (2004) of audits in Sweden, New Zealand, Hong Kong and the UK (see Table 1) illustrates that there are significant similarities between the expected outcomes of the audits conducted by external agencies in these countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wahlén (2004:142)</th>
<th>Meade &amp; Woods</th>
<th>Stensaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and organization of quality work</td>
<td>Strengthening internal review mechanisms; Specific staff appointments (QA managers)</td>
<td>Organisation and academic leadership: increased centralisation and bureaucratisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy and strategy</td>
<td>Planning (strategic, international)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cooperation with stakeholders
Universal participation
Evaluation and follow-up
Staff development
Work environment
Internationalisation
Gender equity

| Purpose of the recommendation | 1. To bolster the development of QA systems within institutions (e.g. strengthening internal review and monitoring systems; increase capacity in institutional support services for QA, for teaching and learning, for research development, for community engagement) | 2. To enhance institutional attention to the improvement of teaching and student learning | 3. To reinforce institutional leaders in their efforts to develop institution wide ‘quality cultures’ | 4. To facilitate discussion, cooperation and development within and between academic units with regard to quality assurance and improvement | 5. To enhance research development and the promotion of a research culture |
In Sweden as well as in New Zealand, the process of external quality assurance was to some extent also linked to social goals (in this case gender equality) and to enhance social consciousness. The South African QA framework is therefore not the first one to make such a link. However, given the emphasis on accountability (fitness of purpose) in the South African QA Framework, the expectation that the external QA process shall contribute directly to the achievement of national goals for higher education - in particular those goals linked to social goals - is much more pronounced.

Since the audits were conducted with reference to the HEQC’s audit criteria, the audit reports reflect the themes in terms of which the criteria are organised. Depending on the findings of the panels, however, there are not necessarily recommendations in the reports with reference to each of the criteria. Based on an analysis of the recommendations in the audit reports of UCT, RU and Stellenbosch, five additional categories were added to provide a grid within which the recommendations can be located.

### TABLE 3:
**SOUTH AFRICA-SPECIFIC TRENDS IN THE NATURE OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>To facilitate the reorientation or clarification of strategies relating to the core academic functions - including institutional transformation and responsiveness - to ensure better alignment with national goals for higher education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>To increase the opportunities for access and success of students from formerly disadvantaged groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>To speed up changes in the staff equity profile.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>To enhance community engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>To reinforce and strengthen institutional efforts to develop more inclusive institutional cultures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a first step in the analysis, the recommendations contained in the three institutions’ audit reports were weighted in terms of their potential impact on the student learning experience, and/or the institutional energy and resources that would be required to give effect to them. For example, recommendations such as

- The HEQC recommends that the institution consider the possibility of making international external examiners a requirement for PhD’s, and create a procedure for appeals in the process of examination of postgraduate degrees within the institution, or
- The HEQC recommends that the institution give serious consideration to re-positioning the Quality Assurance Working Group as a Senate Committee, thus enabling it to insert its work into the formal academic oversight responsibilities of Senate, or
- The HEQC recommends that the institution consider strengthening the importance of teaching and learning at the institution by redefining the position of the Committee for Learning and Teaching in Senate, revising its composition to
include representation from the quality unit and reviewing its relationship to other committees such as the Programme Advisory Committee”

will not have the same potential impact on an institution as recommendations such as

- The HEQC recommends that, in order to accelerate improvement in its redress and equity profile, the institution develop a recruitment strategy that indicates firstly, institutional enrolment targets for African, Coloured and Indian students; secondly the resources and mechanisms that will be put in place in order to achieve these targets, and thirdly, the support mechanisms which the University will institute in order to facilitate the academic success of students”, or

- The HEQC recommends that the institution accelerate the implementation of its Employment Equity Policy and Plan, paying specific attention to targets and timeframes, consistency in application across the University, and the development of more structured forms of support for Black and women academic and support staff, or

- The HEQC recommends that the institution prepare a redress and equity plan to transform the demographic profile of its student enrolments which include the development and operationalisation of faculty specific indicators for equity and access which could form part of the performance management system for faculty staff.

The following criteria were used to weight the recommendations by an impact factor of 1, 2 or 3 as follows:

**IMPACT FACTOR 1:**
Recommendations that would

a) have no/slight impact on the quality of the student learning experience and/or
b) have no/slight impact on the quality of the research environment, and/or
c) require little institutional energy and resources (human and financial resources)

**IMPACT FACTOR 2:**
Recommendations weighted between 1 and 3

**IMPACT FACTOR 3:**
Recommendations that would

d) have a major impact on the quality of the learning experience, and/or
e) have a major impact on the quality of the research environment, and/or
f) require substantial institutional energy and resources (human and financial) and/or
g) impact on the whole University and also possibly beyond the University
A number of the recommendations in the three Audit Reports can be located in more than one category. In those cases where a specific recommendation was assigned to more than one category, the frequency of the weighted totals was taken into account to arrive at an indication of the number of recommendations per category. A recommendation with a weight of 1, therefore, when placed in two different categories contributes 0.5 to the total for that category, et cetera. When these totals are considered in relation to the total number of recommendations - per individual institution as well as for all three institutions combined – it gives an indication of the relative weight assigned by the HEQC to each of the ten categories. The results of this analysis are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

A few important caveats are to be kept in mind when this analysis is considered.

- The HEQC aims to take great care to express audit conclusions in nuanced statements in qualitative, narrative reports. A quantitative analysis such as this one should be seen against that background, and its limits should be recognised.
- Although the HEQC takes care to balance their audit reports in various ways (e.g. between commendations and recommendations) and to be consistent across institutions in their style of reporting, the number of commendations and recommendations per institution cannot be used as a basis for inferences on the quality of an institution or to compare institutions. To use the Audit Reports as a basis for comparison is thus not possible – therefore the institutions are not named in Tables 4 and 5.
- In order to fully assess the weight of the commendations and recommendations, each commendation and recommendation would need to be understood within the institutional contexts and the nuanced narrative of the Audit Report and not as isolated pronouncements. However, in the view of the authors, the commendations and recommendations do represent summary statements of the most important issues addressed in the report, and as such it is justified to use them as a basis for an analysis for the purpose of determining the relative weight assigned by the HEQC to the different issues.

**TABLE 4:**
**WEIGHTED TOTALS OF RECOMMENDATIONS PER CATEGORY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of recommendations</th>
<th>Institution 1</th>
<th>Institution 2</th>
<th>Institution 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  To bolster the development of QA systems within institutions (e.g. strengthening internal review and monitoring systems; increase capacity in institutional support services for QA, for teaching and learning, for research development, for community engagement)</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  To enhance institutional attention to the improvement of teaching and student learning</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  To reinforce institutional leaders in their</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of recommendations</td>
<td>Institution 1</td>
<td>Institution 2</td>
<td>Institution 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1  To bolster the development of QA systems within institutions (e.g. strengthening internal review and monitoring systems; increase capacity in institutional support services for QA, for teaching and learning, for research development, for community engagement)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  To enhance institutional attention to the improvement of teaching and student learning</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  To reinforce institutional leaders in their efforts to develop institution wide ‘quality cultures’</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  To facilitate discussion, cooperation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 5:**
WEIGHTED RECOMMENDATIONS PER CATEGORY AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL OF WEIGHTED RECOMMENDATIONS
and development within and between academic units with regard to quality assurance and improvement

5 To enhance research development and the promotion of a research culture 13 7 5 9

Sub total international categories 51

6 To facilitate the reorientation or clarification of strategies relating to the core academic functions - including institutional transformation and responsiveness - to ensure better alignment with national goals for higher education. 16 22 10 16

7 To increase the opportunities for access and success of students from formerly disadvantaged groups. 8 12 17 12

8 To speed up changes in the staff equity profile. 12 11 4 9

9 To enhance community engagement 1 4 7 4

10 To reinforce and strengthen institutional efforts to develop more inclusive institutional cultures 9 13 3 8

Sub total South Africa-specific categories 49

TOTAL 100 100 100 10

6 Conclusion

a) The different institutional contexts within which the audit preparation processes were conducted influenced the way in which each institution approached the audit and used it to advance their institutional agendas.

b) Institutional agents play a critical role in mediating the HEQC audit expectations within the specific institutional contexts and this impacted on the way participants in the institutions experienced the audit process.

c) While the context and approach to the audit was unique to each institution, the participants’ experience of the audit process in all three institutions was similar in a number of respects. In all three institutions the audit preparation process was experienced to be a more useful learning and developmental experience than the audit visit.

d) The HEQC tried to balance the fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose goals of the audits in the audit reports.
• The average percentage of the weighted recommendations for all three institutions for those categories similar to international trends is 51%.

• The average percentage of the weighted recommendations for all three institutions for those categories related to the distinctive South African approach of using QA as a transformation instrument is 49%.

e) The impact of mediation by the institutional agents is critical in the roll-out of the audit system. These agents are also likely to play a significant role in the process of developing and implementing improvement plans.

In terms of the South African national quality framework, institutions are expected to submit quality improvement plans in which they indicate how they intend to respond to the recommendations in the audit reports. When the implementation of these improvement plans is considered in future (a progress report is expected from each institution two years after the receipt of the audit report), the institutions will be in a position to assess the extent to which the audits made a real impact on their quality.
Bibliography


Multiple quality assurance practices in higher education have developed according to the period, the context and culture. Aside from the shared operating procedures (quality framework, internal evaluation, external evaluation,), that have widely been discussed in the best practice guides, we can wonder what these practices really have in common, what makes them different, what makes them effective and on what aspects. After having highlighted a few differentiating elements of practices in this field, we will report on a quality assurance approach that enhances initiative and aims for the continual improvement of quality within HEIs. The example of the accreditation of medico-social institution manager training in France will serve to illustrate its effects. Reference will be made in particular to two attributes of quality assurance, the co-building of assurance and the relative nature of quality, which explain the improvement dynamics and limit any ambition to ensure the uniformity of both quality contents and quality assurance practices in this area.

From quality concepts to quality assurance practices

In the field of higher education, quality is defined as fitness for purpose, fitness of purpose, excellence, threshold or basic standard, enhancement or improvement, value for money, consumer satisfaction... However, the resulting practical definitions are insufficient to approach quality as a concept. Based on the general idea that quality is “the totality of characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs.”¹, we will consider quality as a social construct. In fact, an element explains the differences observed in the various conceptions of quality: the needs referred to in quality practices (quality approach, quality assurance, continual improvement of quality, etc.) are negotiated needs between different players. In higher education many types of players can be identified: students, professors, employers, qualified professional groups, consumers or citizens concerned by the action of trained professionals, funders, etc. Their needs and their quality conception of higher education do not overlap and may even be contradictory. For example, traditionally in the academic field, education quality is frequently considered equivalent to the quality of the knowledge dispensed, which knowledge is itself linked to the quality of the research developed, while professional sectors consider that quality in education is appreciated by the effectiveness of the alumni in their professional activities. Quality will thus have a variable dimension and variable content according to the players involved in defining the expected quality and related stakes. Depending on the case, the negotiation can involve one or more categories of players, and proceed by seeking a consensus or attempting to convince. Quality thus built will always be relative, enhancing certain needs over others, more or less covering the expectations of the different beneficiaries. Its major interest is to constitute a point of agreement enabling a set of players to share common benchmarks on what can be expected of an activity at a given time and in a given context. This is also the reason for which quality frameworks or standards are regularly updated.

¹ ISO 8402 standard
Finally, in the field of quality practices, we propose the following definition: **quality is a set of characteristics of a product or service, socially recognised as able to satisfy identified needs.**

Quality assurance in higher education is developing in a context in which strongly interacting multiple developments are taking place: globalisation of production and trade, technological mutations, new forms of social and political regulation, territorialisation of political decision making, stronger autonomy of individuals and organisations. The challenges related to this context are also found in the content of the quality expected: visibility of the offer of education, recognition of diplomas and academic qualifications, adequacy of the graduates’ skills with regard to socio-economic needs... This leads to common trends in the definition of quality and in the management of quality assurance systems. This is not sufficient to make them uniform, however, as the handling of these challenges varies according to the social, cultural and economic contexts.

External quality assurance supposes the production of a quality framework that can be applied to a set of institutions operating in a determined area. The formalisation of quality frameworks and their use highlight these opposed and complementary conceptions of quality depending on whether threshold references, excellence references, broad or specific references are applied. Threshold references are used to ensure that institutions meet a set of minimum resource, operating and performance criteria. Excellence references are used to define a framework for progress. With broad references, institutions are free to interpret and responsible for interpreting what is expected from them and incited to build up their own quality criteria; external experts are given a margin of interpretation and negotiation with institutions on what the reference covers. Specific references draw a clear framework of expectations that limit the interpretations on either side. Quality can be assured to strive for security or to strive for development. The type of attitude expected of institutions according to these two logics will vary from conformity to initiative: the conformity attitude will be stronger with specific threshold references; initiative will be higher with broad excellence references. Analysing the stakes and defining the functions to be fulfilled by the quality assurance system are two essential stages in building up its methodology (e.g. type and content of the quality framework, organization of site visits, publication of reports, etc.).

If the target is the continual improvement of quality, the expectation of conformity and logics of control are probably not the best options for external quality assurance. Conversely, allowing each institution alone to define for itself the quality it wishes to develop, without standards shared with others, and only assuring the quality of commitments made, can only lead to making the multiple forms of quality implemented incomparable, which as a result does not guarantee continual improvement. Quality assurance can constitute effective leverage for the promotion of quality in a field provided the quality requirements are shared and that the quality assurance is co-built in this field.

**The dynamic of the co-building**

All external quality assurance organizations today consider that their role is first to support the internal quality assurance process of institutions. In this logic, co-building quality assurance is a necessity. If we consider that quality assurance is above all a system that “gives
confidence that quality requirements will be met”, the internal and external processes that guarantee it contribute to building this confidence. In this sense, co-building between external and internal assurance quality is an obvious necessity. Insisting on the role of external quality assurance as a support for internal quality assurance signifies that the impact of the first is conditioned by the mobilization of the second. The question is then to know how to elicit the potential of co-building to work towards this mobilization.

For many agencies, the co-building of quality assurance can already be expressed at different levels: consultation to establish the quality frameworks, comparison of internal and external evaluations, discussion on the findings of the external evaluation report, shared thinking on the paths for improvement... Likewise, the HEIs can contribute, through their evaluations of the practices of the agency, to improving external quality assurance methods.

The lack of co-building offers by quality assurance agencies most often leads institutions to experience external quality assurance systems as an imposition, to interpret the site visits as inspections and to develop a defensive attitude with regard to the recommendations. In particular, this can lead the institutions to develop avoidance strategies while making believe that they have embraced the recommendations.

Conversely, external quality assurance practices that multiply offers to have the institutions participate in the definition and renewal of quality, to develop a shared vision of the quality implemented by the institution, to verify the contribution of the agency’s action to develop the institution’s internal quality assurance, and to take into consideration the suggestions of the institution in order to improve its own operation, tend to more effectively rally efforts towards self-regulation.

A certain number of theories concerning social behaviour can be used to interpret these effects: that of self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 1985), commitment (Kiesler, 1971) and organizational justice (Greenberg, 1987). The theory of self-determination provides that if the context leads individuals to feel accountable for their behaviour, to assume responsibility for the choices they make, to develop their autonomy, they will have a feeling of self-determination that will lead them to develop an intrinsic motivation better able to sustain behavioural consistency over time. The theory of commitment postulates that individuals are committed by their acts more than by their discourse. When an act is freely carried out with a strong feeling of liberty, when it is public and irrevocable, it has a greater chance of being followed by acts going in the same direction. Finally, one of the aspects of the theory of organizational justice that concerns procedural justice is that the processes in which individuals participate in decision-making, in which they are informed, in which they can justify themselves, give an opinion, and issue complaints, have a positive influence on the feeling of equity that plays affirmatively on involvement in these processes.

Furthermore, the effect of commitment can potentially concern all stakeholders when they are involved in the co-building of quality assurance. Hence, widely associating them in the management of quality assurance systems, in the evaluations, and even in the decisions, becomes important. The effectiveness and repercussions of external quality assurance practices can be strengthened by this action model.

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2 ISO 9000-2000 standards
Co-building practices also provide an opportunity to enrich the options taken at every level of the management of the quality assurance system by taking the different points of view into consideration and thus creating a constant dynamic moving towards continual improvement.

The virtues of relativity

Recognizing that any quality defined is necessarily relative can lead to developing a more open position with regard to its implementation. The particularity of the contexts in which HEIs operate, the resources they have available, the unique cultures they embody, have a role on the perception of quality and the priorities selected regarding improvement. This is evident when the HEIs are located in highly differentiated regions of the world and the frameworks reflect this. This is also true for HEIs of a same region covered by a single quality assurance system. The existence of a common framework will not eliminate all these differences that also provide agencies with an opportunity to spur the movement towards improvement.

Thus, the concept of relative quality can facilitate the use of open and dynamic standards. The standards can then be the references for action rather than prescriptions. The aim is to mobilize towards the development of quality by giving benchmarks but also by enhancing initiative. Concretely, on the part of the agency this can involve recognizing quality even though a reference is not followed if the HEI can prove that its way of working allows achieving an effect similar to that targeted by the application of this reference, or even a better effect in light of the context. This can also involve the recognition of initiatives taken regarding quality that exceed what is provided for in the quality framework.

The relativity of quality is directly related to the relativity of the needs that it is designed to meet and to the respective weight of the stakeholders that are recognised as being able to express these needs. The needs taken as a reference are not stable. They are constantly evolving and an overly mechanistic view of quality could penalise the HEIs that anticipate coming changes better than others do, justifying the importance of an open approach to quality and to its evaluation. For the HEIs, this involves the necessity of not considering the satisfaction of standards as the endpoint of quality and of always taking care to best respond to the needs related to its mission. For the agencies, this involves the necessity of not appreciating quality only through the prism of standards but being aware of and supportive of the initiatives and innovations that satisfy emerging needs. The aim for both is to nurture a culture of quality.

Acknowledging the relativity of quality is also avoiding any form of dogmatism that would identify the quality defined as being an indisputable truth. Quality does not belong to the field of truth but to that of value, hence the necessity of negotiating its terms to allow the necessary adaptations to social life. However, this does not suppose negotiating everything at all times. The purpose of a framework is to serve as a foundation for delimiting expectations regarding quality for a given time period. It is a reference but not a yoke. It must allow the justification of deviations in context.

Shared quality: accreditation of socio-medical institution manager training in France

For more than ten years, ENSP has been tasked by the French Health and Social Affairs Ministries with assuring the quality of socio-medical institution manager training organized
by about twenty institutions. As part of this assignment, it takes on the role of quality assurance agency. An accreditation committee works entirely independently and takes accreditation decisions (non accreditation, qualified accreditation, unqualified accreditation, accreditation with acknowledged excellence) and makes recommendations. A pool of eighteen auditors that meet regularly in technical and thinking meetings divide the external evaluations of the institutions among themselves (each external evaluation requires three auditors one of whom is a qualified manager of a medico-social institution).

“Shared quality” is an action model that is used as a reference by the different players of the accreditation system. The process is designed based on three structuring aspects: quality, otherness, and development. Quality, as we have seen, is defined with regard to identified needs as well as criteria that allow characterising the conditions for meeting these needs, and to instrumented verifications of the deviations from these criteria. Otherness is first the acknowledgement of the specific culture of each institution, of its unique identity and it is taking into consideration the many differences between institutions, including how they reflect on the quality. Finally, development refers to the directions set by the organisation to move forward, to improvement initiatives, and to the search for optimisation.

Building on “quality” and “otherness” should be assertive/critical cooperation that can drive the continual improvement of quality. Concretely speaking, many occasions are given to institutions to give their opinion, show the relevance of their choices and react at different times during the external evaluation. References can be discussed at any time if the institution demonstrates that other ways of doing things can guarantee quality. This does not mean that any argument is acceptable and openness to dialogue is not equivalent to the approval of all alternatives.

Building on “otherness” and “development”, quality can possibly take on changing forms through recognising the initiatives taken by accredited organizations and highlighting their creativity. Concretely speaking, the institutions are asked to highlight in their self-assessments and during the site visits their initiatives spurring the development of their internal quality beyond what is strictly provided for by the framework. This effort participates in enhancing an internal culture of quality.

The dynamics of the continual improvement of responses provided to the –constantly-changing– needs of beneficiaries rest on the “quality” and “development” aspects. The implementation of the procedures built into the accreditation system should enable the organisations concerned to engage in a continual and sustained improvement cycle. Concretely speaking, the accredited institutions, like the different stakeholders, are heavily involved when the framework is reviewed in order to make it a truly shared tool. Recommendations support the relevant improvements that must be acknowledged as being necessary by the institutions.

This action model is not always easy to implement for auditors and members of the accreditation committee. There is a strong temptation to only base external evaluations on observable facts as assessed against the quality requirements, thereby limiting a consideration of the context and institutional cultures. In particular, this forces members of the audit team and the accreditation committee to constantly reflect on their own practices. This may be the price to pay to promote a culture of quality.
The evaluations of the external quality assurance process carried out in the institutions shows strong acceptance of the principles presented and a recognition of its contribution to the continual improvement of quality. A minority of institutions still have reservations and experience external quality assurance as an imposition. Their position is based on their claim to be their own judges of the quality produced.

**Conclusion**

Quality, as part of quality assurance systems, is necessarily relative and co-built and quality assurance is the result of a more or less expanded co-building process. These characteristics could be deemed factors undermining the solidity of the guarantee that quality assurance is supposed to provide. In fact, they are more likely to affect the most inflexible or standardising conceptions of quality assurance. For those focusing on the continual improvement of quality, experience has shown that these two attributes drive development. However, such a focus requires one to factor in simultaneously stability and change, shared references and adaptation to the contexts, compliance and innovation. Without aiming to further the professional level of the relevant functions, this requires that the players of external quality assurance –and most particularly expert auditors– be suitably trained and constantly reflect on their own practices.

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Introduction
This paper explores how academics in England perceive the impact and effects of quality audit on their work. Considering the concept of the rise of ‘audit culture’ (Strathern, 2000) which brings the “rapid and relentless spread of coercive technologies into higher education” (Shore & Wright, 2000, pp. 57), and the control nature of the quality audit (Power, 1994, 1999), this researcher examines the impact of the quality audit through how academics think of the impact of the quality assurance mechanisms on their work.

This paper reports on a single case study of a research-intensive pre-1992 university in England, drawing on data from a substantial document analysis, and 94 interviews with academics from seven different subjects. This paper thus discusses the perceived impact of the quality audit by

- relating quality as fitness for purpose and quality as value for money with the quality audit practice in England;
- providing a historical overview of the evolution of the quality audit in England and analyzing it as a policy issue;
- explaining the close relationship between the quality audit and the quality assurance mechanisms;
- reviewing some studies that have addressed the impact of the quality audit on the work of academics;
- analyzing new data about and discussing how the quality audit has affected academics’ undergraduate classroom teaching practice, curriculum, academic workload, and power relations between academics and students; and
- arguing that the quality audit has achieved both negative and positive impacts on the work of academics, and that there appears to be a tension between the quality audit and academics’ perceived professionalism.

Conceptualizing quality in the context of higher education in England
Of the different interpretations of quality, fitness for purpose (Harvey & Green, 1993) has become the mostly evidently employed one in UK higher education (Lomas, 2002; Ottewill & Macfarlane, 2004). For example, the 1987 White Paper emphasized that academic standards were “reflected in the design and content of courses, their fitness for purpose, what they require of students and how they meet the needs of employers” (DES, 1987, pp. 16). Since 1997 the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education has overseen the quality of the HEIs in UK in terms of fitness for purpose, and checked the institution’s arrangements for maintaining academic standards (QAA, 2006).
The notion of value for money is first presented by the 1984 Audit Commission, implying paying less for the best product. Green & Harvey (1993) identify it as a populist view of quality because public services are expected to be accountable to the funding bodies and to the customers. This definition accords with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which has a statutory obligation to ensure that higher education provision offers value from the public resources invested in it (Ottewill & Macfarlane, 2004; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003). The prevalence of quality as fitness for purpose and quality as value for money suggests that quality has become related with the accountability within the HEIs in England, and has become an ideological symbol that legitimates the UK Government to increase an expansion of and to exert control on higher education while reducing resources for it.

Quality audit in England
Together with quality, the culture and mechanics of quality audit have become central to ways of talking about administrative control in England since the late 1980s (Power, 1994, 1999). By the early 1990s, audit has been used as a main way to ensure that institutions are providing higher education, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard, and that institutions are exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner (QAA, 2006).

Context of the quality audit
There are various factors contributing to the growth of this culture of quality audit, of which four are discussed in this paper: the changed relationship between the State and the HEIs; the expansion of higher education in UK; the increased pressure for accountability and efficiency in the use of public funds; and the evolution of the funding bodies for higher education. These factors help to reveal the worsened working conditions of the academic, and explain in part academics’ skepticism of and resistance to the quality audit.

Changed relationship between the State and the HEIs
There is a substantial literature on the changed relationship between the State and the HEIs in UK. Henkel & Little (1999) argues that the relationship between the State and the HEIs has shifted from an exchange relationship to a sponsorship-dependency relationship from the world wars to 1989. Universities have become increasingly financially dependent upon the Government since the late 1940s (Salter & Tapper, 1994). The Thatcher Government had increased its control over the funding, planning and management of higher education since the 1980s (Salter & Tapper, 1994). Currently, the Government of Blair has been seen as an investor in higher education, wanting the HEFCE to deliver national priorities, a mass higher education, but not at elite system price (Taggart, 2004).
Expansion of the higher education

The aforementioned changed relationship has greatly influenced the expansion of higher education. In 1945, UK universities catered for 3 per cent of the school-leaver age group, but the numbers rose to 32 per cent in 1995 (Kogan & Hanney, 2000). According to DfES (2003), 43% of 18–30 year olds participated in higher education in 2003. The UK Government aims to increase participation towards 50 per cent of those aged 18–30 by 2010 (ibid).

This expansion has resulted in the worsening of staff-student ratios, the fall in the unit of resource, and the reduced payment of academics. The ratio of students to university staff was 8.1 between 1971/72 (Halsey 1992), and became 17 in 1994/95 (Kogan & Hanney, 2000). Meanwhile, the grants plus fees for full-time equivalent students in the UK fell between 1995/96 and 1998/99 from 4904 pounds to 4305 pounds, a drop of 12.2 per cent (AUT 1996). During the expansion, academic salaries suffered considerable attrition when compared with those of comparable groups (Dearing Report, 1997, pp.32).

Requirement for accountability and efficiency

During the expansion, there is an increased pressure on the HEIs for accountability and efficiency in the use of public funds (DES 1987; DES, 1991; Goslingi & D’Andrea, 2001; Johnson, 2000). The requirement for efficiency in UK higher education has arguably undergone three phases: efficiency as bureaucratic-rationality, efficiency as more for less, and efficiency as economy (Johnson, 2000). Under the banner of efficiency, accountability has become a watchword for the institutions to make more effective responses to the increasing demand for higher education benefits for the individuals as well as for the economy and society as a whole (DES, 1991).

Evolution of the funding bodies for higher education

In order to make higher education more responsive to social and economic needs, the UK Government made reforms on the funding councils for the HEIs. The funding body has developed from the University Grant Committee (UGC) (1919-1989), the University Funding Council (UFC) (1988-1992), to the Higher Education Funding Councils for England (HEFCE) (1992 until now).

The UGC is perceived as a ‘buffer’ organization between the Government and the universities, characterized as a partnership based on mutual dependence (Brown, 2004; Scott, 1995; Shatock, 1994; Taggart, 2004). Compared with the UGC, the UFC was more accountable to the Government (Scott, 1995), and was seen as a purchaser of teaching and research from the university on behalf of the Government (Taggart, 2004).

There is a debate on the role of the HEFCE. The HEFCE sees itself as a mediator and buffer organization between the Government and the higher education sector.
However, Roger Brown, the former Chief Executive of the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), argues that the HEFCE acts more or less directly as agents of the Government (Brown, 2004). Taggart (2004) reveals that the HEFCE has actually become a regulator and manager of higher education, absorbing the demands of the Government and using the power of financial regulation to exercise control and influence over the higher education sector.

The HEFCE established the QAA in 1997 to provide impetus towards generating and strengthening the quality assurance mechanisms within the institution, and to ensure that the Government policies are actually implemented. The QAA works with the HEIs to define academic standards and quality, and carries out and publishes reviews against these standards (QAA, 2007).

**The quality audit and the quality assurance mechanisms**

In England, the audit of the HEIs began in the early 1990s under the HEQC. The QAA changed its methodology in this decade and moved away from subject audit to incorporating everything in the institutional audit. The first round of institutional audits was completed in 2005, with 70 institutions participated in it. Thereafter a six-year cycle becomes the norm (QAA, 2005).

According to Power (1994, 1999), audit is ‘control of control’. The audited organizations develop their own internal system of control, and the external audit process concentrates on checking these controls (ibid). This suggests that the quality audit in UK higher education is a ‘layered’ activity organized around two systems of control – the external quality assurance mechanisms and the internal ones. This research thus explores the perceived impact of the quality audit through these quality assurance mechanisms.

**Research methods**

This case study draws data from document analysis and 94 interviews with academics from 7 different subjects. The first phase interview was 64 semi-structured interviews taken place from January to April 2005, addressing two research questions:

- What perceived impact has the external quality assurance mechanism had on the work of academics?
- What perceived impact has the internal quality assurance mechanism within the institution had on the work of academics?

The external quality assurance mechanisms studied include the institutional audit, the benchmark statements, program specification, external examining, and professional, regulatory and statutory body (PSRB) review, and the 2005 National Student Survey (NSS) (see footnote 1). The main internal quality assurance mechanisms within my case university are annual program review, approval system for new and revised programs, peer observation and student course evaluation.
The second phase interview carried out in October 2005, interviewing via emails with 30 academics who were also interviewed in the first phase. This phase interview explores the themes of bureaucracy and academics’ perceptions of their professionalism.

**Studying academics’ perception of the quality audit**

A lot of academic writings have argued against the negative impacts of the quality audit, such as the increase of bureaucracy (Goslingi & D’Andrea, 2001; Harvey, 2005; Kogan et al., 2000), increased workload (Morley, 2003; Newton, 2002), distrust of academics (Morley, 2003; Newton, 2000; Trow, 1994), lack of improvement in quality of teaching and learning (Goslingi and D’Andrea, 2001; Harvey, 2005; Newton, 2000; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003), and etc. These themes are explored and addressed in my case study.

**Increase of bureaucracy**

The increased bureaucracy due to administrative burden has become a concern in the higher education sector (Harvey, 2005; Goslingi & D’Andrea, 2001). This case study reveals that my respondents’ interpretation of bureaucracy depends on which side of the fence they sit, academics or manager academics. The general picture is that the term bureaucracy is getting used for pejorative reasons, and that the academic respondents show strong resentment to it. They normally associate bureaucracy with administrative support of a department/faculty/university, the quality audit, an excess of paperwork, the necessity to conform to regulations, and excessive adherence to rules or standards.

In contrast, some administrator and manager academic respondents hold different views that bureaucracy is a necessity, especially in an age of audit, because some work practices need to be standardized. They feel that the quality audit is not the main cause of bureaucracy, but that some academics are using it as a form of resistance and tend to label things required by the quality audit as bureaucracy. For example, a male senior manager in Arts asserted that:

... *Bureaucracy is a pejorative term for 'formalised administrative procedures', in academic usage, .... In some cases, virtually all administration is so labelled. ...Possible examples of things which my colleagues might label as bureaucracy; Annual Programme Review ..., the process for approving new optional units, ..., the paperwork surrounding the training and mentoring of new staff. In general, it is the audit culture that requires that everything should be written down, minuted, approved by a range of people.* (Respondent 17)

It is tentative to say that the widespread use of the term bureaucracy among the academic respondents has two implications. One is that the HEIs are not bureaucracy free (Kogan, 1999), because a lot of decision-making process will inevitably become
bureaucratized to ensure that “they fall within existing policies and are consistent with practices being developed in the rest of the university” (pp. 271). The other suggests a worry among some academic respondents that when the process of the quality audit is split into minute functional tasks and those tasks are in turn separated from each other, bureaucracy could function as ‘a moral sleeping pill’ (Bauman, 1989), because moral awareness and responsibility would be dissolved in the process of the quality audit.

**Increased workload of academics**

According to Morley (2003), the internalized imperative of the academics to work longer time reveals the psychic life of power, and that the quality audit has contributed to the academics’ increased workload in Britain. However, the Association of University Teachers (AUT) survey in 1994 of 2670 academics in the UK revealed that the average length of the working week in British universities was 53.5 hours (Court, 1996). This survey was conducted before the widespread of the audit culture, so it suggests that there has been a long-hour culture among the academics before the coming of the quality audit.

In this case study, 65% respondents feel that their workloads are relatively heavy. The quality audit is perceived as one factor that has increased the workload of the academics. There is evidence that some other factors also contribute to the increased workload, such as, the expansion of higher education, excessive teaching hours, scores of pressure in research, and disproportionate administration, and etc.

**Improved undergraduate classroom teaching practice?**

In literatures, there are different views on the impact of the quality audit on teaching. On one hand, there is a wide criticism that quality audit diverts academic staff time towards administering elaborate, which actually undermines the quality of teaching and learning that it designs to monitor and promote (Goslingi and D’Andrea, 2001; Harvey, 2005; Morley, 2003; Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2003). On the other hand, there is an argument that the quality audit has achieved some positive impacts on teaching; for example, an increased attention has been given towards the quality of teaching as a result of the external assessments (Brennan et al, 1997a). Dill (2001) shares similar view that due to the increased institutional attention towards teaching and learning, there are more active discussions and co-operation within academic units, and a more clarified responsibility for improving teaching and student learning and provision of better information on best practice.

This case study reveals that the respondents hold mixed views on how the quality audit has affected their undergraduate teaching. 53% respondents are cynical about the quality audit and find it have no or little impact on their teaching practice. However, 40% respondents argue that the quality audit is important in raising the importance of teaching in this research – intensive university, and that the quality audit has changed some undergraduate teaching practice, such as supporting and developing notions of good teaching among the academics, helping to get rid of some bad teaching practice,
increasing reflection on the teaching practice, and diversifying the teaching style. Among the rest of the respondents, 6% are neutral to the quality audit. 1% refuses to make any comments.

Of the external quality assurance mechanism, a lot of respondents point out that program specification has not made any difference on their teaching. However, some senior managers argue that it is because some departments and academics are indifferent to the program specification. For example, a senior manager in engineering studies addresses this indifference that:

... Every department simply identifies a one who went into the corner and did it (program specification). (laughter) and end of story and I would guess the majority of the staff even haven't read them. (laughter) (Respondent 5)

The majority of my respondents know little about the subject benchmark statement. They do not think it would affect their teaching. As to the external examining, most respondents regard it as a friendly, helpful and professional peer system in maintaining the quality of higher education, but with some flaws, such as the little pay, heavy work, difficulty in finding a good examiner, the intimate relationship between some examiners and the school/department examined, and etc. Few respondents feel that this examining system has had some impact on their undergraduate teaching practice.

The 2005 National Student Survey is not yet well known among the academic respondents, but it is seriously criticized for its flawed methods. The majority of the respondents feel that the survey will not have any effect on their individual teaching. However, a few respondents believe that it will be useful in helping the department/school realize its weak links, such as, the communication problem with the students within the department, the assessment and feedback area.

Although most respondents dislike the QAA, a few academics and manager academics hold that it is useful in keeping academics on their toe and making academics think more about their teaching:

I think it (QAA) has made people ... think about their teaching.... And it would be naïve to say that ... everything was perfect, because I don’t think it was. And I think perhaps ... it was bad practice, if you like. I wasn’t particular aware of a lot of it, but I think what QAA does is to make you think about it... a bit more..., and make sure that you are doing .... and I think it keeps you on your toe, if you like. ... And I don’t see anything wrong with that..., and I think it is a good idea ... (respondent 12)

There is a commonly accepted view that the student course evaluation is more useful in improving academics’ teaching practice than the peer observation, partly because peer observation is relatively complementary, while the student evaluation is more likely to reveal the teaching inadequacy. Most respondents take the student course evaluation seriously. They find it useful in reminding them of their shortcomings, improving their way of delivering the lecturers, and making them take the students’ need and interest
into consideration in their teaching. This finding accords with Wilson et al’s (1997) view that student course evaluation is a valid, reliable and useful indicator of teaching quality, with the capacity of providing crucial information about course quality. However, some other respondents hold different view that the peer observation is also useful in improving their teaching practice, such as diversifying their teaching style, helping them gain confidence in their teaching, and making minor changes of their teaching practice.

*Is Curriculum affected by quality audit?*

The curriculum is an important part of the academic work. According to Barnett (2000), the academics’ dominant influence in shaping the curricula is dissolving because of the external influences, such as the growing student market, the changing interests of employers, and the state’s requirement for responsiveness towards the world of work (ibid).

However, this case study reveals that the academic hegemony in shaping the curriculum is still dominating in the context of the quality audit culture because most quality assurance mechanisms have not had much impact on the curriculum. Although the professional, regulatory and statutory body (PRSBS), on behalf of the Government, has significantly influenced the curriculum, in controlling and validating them, the PRSBS only applies to some vocationally orientated awards. Its impact varies with the subjects. For example, the respondents from medical related course take the PRSBS more seriously than those from computer related course. From the perception of the respondents, this is because computer science is a very fast developing subject, some requirements from the British Computer Society become outdated quickly. The respondents thus feel irritated when have to obey these requirements. However, the medical course is usually concerned with health and safety, so the respondents feel obliged to obey the requirement of its PRSBS.

*New power relations between academics and students?*

With the expansion of the higher education, the adoption of top up fee, and the prevalence of the student course evaluation, there is a concern that the pedagogic relationship will be transformed into a commercial transaction (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2003, 2005). Sharing similar views, Morley (2003) regards the student course evaluation as a new device to curb the power of academics and challenge the intellectual oligarch. These reveal a concern among the academics that the student evaluation represents a new source of authority that has changed the balance of power within academic institutions (Moore & Kuol, 2005).

This case study examines whether there is a new power relation between academics and students. The findings are that two third of the respondents do not think the students’ power has emerged, and that the academics still have the power over the students in spite of all the evaluation processes, but the academics have become more responsive to the needs of the students. The rest respondents feel that the power relations between
academics and students will be changed in the future, maybe towards becoming more equal. However, there are various attitudes towards this potential change. Some respondents argue that it will remove some bad teaching practices because the students want more clarity. For example, a female lecturer in philosophy related course gave an example that:

Err, ... for example, I have seen ... students complaining bitterly ... year on year ... about a certain lecturer, who give terrible lectures. And nothing happened. ... I think in future, they will be able to, say: 'look, something has to happen.'... I think their view is less likely to be ignored. (Respondent 56)

However, most respondents are worried that the to be changed power relation would make the students become more demanding in terms of lectures, units, style of lectures, and pastoral care. There is even a fear among these respondents that the academics will become secondary to the students because of the demand for more accountability.

**Tension between quality audit and academics’ perception of their professionalism**

All the 30 respondents in the second phase interviews think they are professionals, but they hold different views of being professionals. The general picture is nearly all the respondents from a subject accredited by the PRSBs consider being professional as being recognized by a professional body or becoming a member of it. The rest respondents interpret being professionals in five main ways:

1. The nature of the job is non manual;
2. Having standards and practices agreed as good and defensible by the cohort, such as a high level of education and qualification/degree, and undertaking regular training in the proper procedure;
3. Possessing ability to do one's job efficiently and effectively, such as skills, high level expertise in the field;
4. Dealing ethically with the work and students, such as conducting acceptable behavior for the promotion/development of their chosen subject, committed to standard and rule of the profession to ensure that one meets the high standards expected in ones work, responsible to students;
5. Having freedom and autonomy to determine their own work practice, and having peer governance.

Some respondents point out that they are incorporating and accommodating to the concept of professionalism which has governed their work practice, but they perceive a tension between the quality audit and their professionalism, caused mainly by the different perceptions of standards and good practices between the academics and the quality audit, time cost of the quality audit procedure, the use of some unprofessional assessors, and the accountability required by the quality audit which is perceived to have decreased trust of academics’ competence in controlling their own work.

There is discussion of quality audit distrusting academics in literature. Martin Trow is amongst the first to associate the development of the external quality assessment with a
withdrawal of the ‘trust’ to the academic community. Trow (1993) argues that the 1991 White Paper (DES, 1991) represents the massive distrust in the traditional professional ethic of continual enhancement of expertise and establishing practices in consultation with both peers and service-users. In similar vein, Morley (2003) argues that the quality assurance has resulted in the decline of trust in professional conduct. Eraut (1994) remarks in a sarcastic way that professional bodies used to exist to protect the public from unqualified non-professionals such as ‘quack’ doctors, but now they function to protect the public from the professionals themselves, and that as a result academics had lost some of their authoritative power, and a new defensiveness is emerging.

Some respondents in this case study feel that the quality audit is distrust, because academics as professionals should not be subjected to scrutiny. They believe that the notions of trust and professionalism should be and have always been linked and interconnected (Evets, 2006). However, half respondents argue that there is no tension between the quality audit and their professionalism. They hold that regular review and self-evaluation is an important part of the professional activity, and that it is time for the academics to learn to prove that they are doing their jobs properly. Quite a few respondents, both academic and manager academic, prefer to see the quality audit as increasing the awareness of accountability, rather than producing distrust, among the academics. They think that the HEIs should be accountable to the fundings from the HEFCE, the academics should be accountable to their salary, and that being accountable is part of academic work, which would make the academics become responsible to the students. For example, a female senior manager in social science argued that:

... we should be accountable to somebody, because we are paid the public money. This is the basic rule. We can’t do whatever we want. We paid actually not bad that amount of public money. We have enormous amount of freedom over our day. You know some academics haven’t worked anything for most of their life....

When asked why being accountable is essential, this respondent replied that:

...I think it very reasonable. I think people who taking their salary but talk in gibberish and never responding to students and doing the sort of worst practice. I think you do need some system to find these to deal with them, because when I was a student, some people were like that. They would cancel 50% of their lectures and never been available when you wanted to see them. You know, in the whole, we don’t behave like that any more.... (Respondent 33)

Some academic respondents also argue that being accountable would stop, prevent, and improve some bad working practice of the academics. For example, a female lecturer in policy studies commends although being accountable means that the workload of the academics would be increased to some extent, it would keep academics on their toe and prevent them from repeating the same teaching materials:

I think it is a good trend.... I think it is tendency to ... back on your toes? A little bit. ... academics just keep repeating the same ... teaching material, ok, I think it will keep on
their toes a little more. They won’t be able to be, err, … lazy is not quite … the right word, but only to work and stay on some materials and … making it interesting and … not being floppy, … in all kinds of ways. (Respondent 22)

The above extracts suggest that the respondents perceive and respond to the quality audit in various ways. Although some of them are resistant to the process of the quality audit, the others are engaging well with it, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and support. There is increasing awareness of accountability among these respondents.

**Conclusion**

This case study reveals that the quality audit is perceived to have changed the general work of the academics interviewed in both positive and negative ways. There is evidence that some respondents operate well within the process of the quality audit and see it provide new paradigms for them to think about and improve their work, and that the quality audit has engendered among them new norms of conduct and professional behavior, such as the increased awareness of good undergraduate teaching, the diversity of the teaching style, and the increasing awareness of accountability. However, the quality audit is considered by my respondents to have contributed in some degree to the increase of their workload, and with little impact on the curriculum. There is a worry that the quality audit might help reverse the power relations between the academics and the students in the future, but the respondents hold mixed views toward this potential change.

The perceived tension between the quality audit and the respondents’ notions of professionalism suggests that the quality audit has challenged some traditional academic values, which focus upon the subject field and normally associate with strong professional authority. Some respondents construct and use the discourse of professionalism to fight against the accountability intrusion of the quality audit and argue that it damages trust in their professionalism. However, there is increased awareness of accountability among the other respondents who perceive it as an instrument of professional change.

**Footnote:**

1. The National Student Survey (NSS) is a national initiative across all publicly-funded higher education institutions in UK. In the view of the HEFCE, the NSS aims to gather feedback on the quality of students' courses, to help inform the choices of future applicants to higher education, and to contribute to public accountability. Results from the NSS are regarded as an essential element of the revised quality assurance framework for higher education. The HEFCE is responsible for the survey. It commissions Ipsos UK to undertake it. This survey was piloted and tested during 2003 and 2004 at 23 HEIs. The first full-scale survey, across more than 140 HEIs, took place in 2005. Results of the NSS are published on the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) web-site. The second survey is now complete and plans are under way for the 2007 survey.
2. For more finding data, please see the forthcoming thesis:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction .................................................................1
II. What is the OCGS Review Process? .................................4
III. The Beginning Steps ....................................................4
    (a) Staff and Student Involvement ..................................6
    (b) The Data ..............................................................6
IV. Not So Good Practice ..................................................9

References ..........................................................................12

Date: March 1, 2007
I. Introduction

This paper arises from a study conducted by the author under the auspices of the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies entitled “Good Practice in the OCGS Appraisals Process.” The paper focuses on observations that have been made during the research that help to explain why certain university approaches to quality assurance succeed (and some other don’t) as drivers of change. The research was conducted in Ontario among the 18 publicly-funded universities and RMC over a six month period – having commenced in July 2006 and having been completed in January 2007. The basic purpose of the study was to learn more about the institutional role in the Ontario appraisal process as it is carried out in the home university and home unit. The collection of this information was intended to lead to the identification of examples of Good Practice within the universities that could be shared and used by the institutions to enhance their universities’ experience with the appraisals process.

A secondary objective of the study was to examine how the universities use the existence of the appraisal process to their best advantage and to identify further good or “winning” practices facilitating change internally. The study reveals that a key player in the quality enhancement environment must be the institution if the review is to be a wholly successful exercise. What the researcher looked for, therefore, were those “win-win” situations where not only the external reviewers (e.g. the review committee and/or the external consultants) precipitated change, but where the review process motivated self-reflection and positive changes by the university itself during or prior to the review.

The author first posits that in order to achieve change, it is essential for the review to be an institutional effort and not merely a compliance exercise.

In many other instances, despite best intentions, institutions have just complied with the expectations of quality assurance agencies resulting in a culture of ‘compliance’ rather than continuous enhancement.1

Good or winning practices will therefore be identified as those that facilitate quality enhancements and continuous improvement within the institutions, even at the very early stages of the process and before Appraisal Committee decisions are reached. Furthermore, those practices will be, by definition, those that involve participatory and consultative decision-making approaches for the following reasons:

1. the author fully concurs with Stella (2002) that in the final analysis, with the opportunity for openness and transparency, better information dissemination and co-operative efforts, positive organizational changes do occur.  
2. (One might revise this slightly to say “are more likely to occur.”)

2 A further explanation for this position is the underlying assumption behind the study and behind this paper; that participatory consultative, open and co-operative approaches (let us call them “collaborative” approaches) are demonstrably conducive to broadening the quality assurance horizon and precipitous of change. As evidence, the author in fact has observed this phenomenon on a number of occasions during her study.

One proviso need to given, however: it is understood that the “sharing of experience and information” (the collaborative approach) may not be easily achieved at all institutions. It is also fair to say that any strategy has to necessarily take cognizance of the contextual conditions, (e.g. large and small institutions, structure of the graduate school, resources available, the relationship with the other parts of the institution and so on), but clarification and/or rethinking of the strategy, and drawing from the experiences of the others, is firmly believed to be the most conducive to change.3

With the collaborative model as the correlative factor, there are many critical stages in the review process where internally change can and does occur. One of the most important of these is the self-study that takes place solely within the university at the very commencement of the review process. The self-study is a critical first step in the process that provides an opportunity to the university and the unit together to do some self-reflection and make changes. The university that approaches the self-study positively and proactively rather than submissively or defensively, in my view, gains immensely from this approach.

The self-study leads to the preparation of the brief (in OCGS terminology), and it can also be characterized as the documentation of the process itself. There is information in the self-study such as inventory data (student numbers, the previous education of students, their working experience, their gender), the vitae of graduate faculty, the teaching load, curricula and surveys of material resources as well as compiled or

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3 Stella, Antony & A. Gnanam, ibid. 2002: 124
aggregated data on such information as times to completion, and graduation rates, that are all crucial to an understanding of the program and to making effective decisions about it, first at the institutional level and later at the process level.

II. What is the OCGS Review Process?

Before presenting further details on the study, the paper provides the reader with a brief description of the OCGS Review Process. Like Australia, where the universities have primary responsibility for their own standards and develop their own processes to ensure these standards, Ontario public universities conduct their own quality assessment of universities and programs and develop and maintain their own standards. This makes Ontario a particularly good example of a region where quality assessment has been conducted at the institutional level successfully for many years, but with a cooperative agreement in place with the Province. Graduate programs offered by or proposed by public universities are assessed on a voluntary basis by the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies (OCGS). The purpose of an assessment is to make recommendations based on quality considerations about existing programs or before new programs are offered. Outcomes of the OCGS reviews are reported yearly to the Government which permits the universities to maintain their autonomy at the same time as fulfill an accountability function to the Province. The Province has agreed to accept the outcome of the review as a necessary condition for funding approval. This process and this cooperative relationship between the institutional and political level has functioned effectively for over twenty years.

III. The Beginning Steps

The Ontario appraisals process begins with the sending out of a list of programs to be reviewed in the upcoming year to the graduate schools in the Ontario universities. Normally, the Graduate Office takes that list and notifies the unit(s) concerned of the upcoming periodic review(s) [although some start even earlier]. The notification takes a variety of forms, and the research revealed some excellent examples of written documentation that describe the process, the benefits of it, and provide detailed direction for the graduate units, which is an excellent start to the process. Emphasis need again be placed on the premise that the self-study should not occur in isolation from the rest of the university. The relationship between management and other units of the institution is extremely important, and the role of those units in decision-making potentially crucial.

One of the first examples of good practice occurs when the Dean and his or her assistant(s) hold an information workshop with regard to the preparation of the brief.

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4 See Pearce, Margaret *Australia Higher Education Quality and Standards: The Evolving Role of the Commonwealth Government*, pg. 1
5 Both UPRAC and OCGS reviews are carried out under the auspices of the Council of Ontario Universities
6 Universities also conduct cyclical academic reviews of each department and program using processes of independent peer review. Many public universities also undergo accreditation at the program level by various international program accreditation agencies, such as those approved by the United States Department of Education.
Some Schools have also taken this opportunity to invite the Executive Director of OCGS to speak about the appraisals process and the needs of the appraisal committee members in terms of information.

An example of an especially winning good practice occurs when a Graduate Dean is successful in persuading the Department Chair to set up a team or “Review Committee” (potentially consisting of such people as the Chair, the graduate coordinator, a faculty member previously involved in the review process, the departmental secretary/administrative assistant/program assistant and, possibly, a student representative) for the conduct of the self-study and the preparation of the brief. One person should accept and identify himself at the outset as having the overall responsibility for the preparation of the brief (he or she may delegate parts of the brief to others) and has the task of pulling it all together. The interaction between the members of the team, the unit (faculty and students) as well as the graduate school tends to lead to broader participation and a more collaborative experience for all, and it is in such an open environment constructive changes can occur.

A third example of Good Practice (and usually as a part of the first workshop) occurs when the Dean himself or herself, realizing the value of ensuring that everyone involved perceives the review as an opportunity for a positive outcome and the consideration of potential change, improvement and strategic planning, makes an influential presentation. The presentation can take more than one form, but the objective is ultimately to help the program to understand and recognize, first and foremost, that self-regulation in a time of public accountability can be beneficial to the whole system. (A simple reminder of the alternative, e.g. a governmental process, is also helpful!) The dean now has an excellent opportunity to put a human face on the review, to place it within the human domain, and to distinguish it from the bureaucracy. It is also an opportunity for the Graduate Dean to demonstrate the positive commitment of the Graduate Office to the program’s “best interest.”

Another aspect of the “Good or Winning Practice” orientation and of setting the stage for the review includes a cautionary note from the Dean. While he or she takes the opportunity to communicate that this is an occasion for honesty, for being straight forward and for the various partners to build a collectivity, it is also important to remind them to remain reasonable (which is also in the best interests of the program). While it is an opportunity for the unit to seek and obtain needed resources internally, to showcase faculty, and to make changes to the program, even if they are not happy with the way it is currently operating, it is not beneficial to use it as an occasion to attack the administration. This can backfire on the unit and potentially cause harm. The self-study, in principle therefore, is an opportunity not to keep the program going in the same direction and to advocate for positive change, but at the same time not to inadvertently place the program itself in jeopardy through a more adversarial approach.

After the department has had some time to think about the program, a further example of Good Practice occurs when the Dean then meets with the Committee (or at the very least the Program Chair) for each individual program under review. This second, more focused meeting is tailored to the issues and specific needs of the particular units. It is also an excellent opportunity for the Dean to draw to the
attention any concerns expressed in the last appraisal and to determine how they have been or are being addressed and to offer his or her assistance to the unit.

(a) Staff and Student Involvement

Since the self-study can have a significant impact on how the external assessment precedes, (see Stella, A. and A. Gnanam: 2002) the internal communication, collaboration and consultation provides the necessary groundwork. As part of the effort to achieve the most benefit from the self-study, staff and students must also be involved in and take part in the ownership of the internal quality assurance practice. Here is yet another opportunity for good practice to emerge. Student input into the self-study also helps to make all involved aware of any issues that might be developing among the students and provides an opportunity to consider appropriate expansion, modification, restructuring or even more modest changes.

One model of good practice occurs when a dean arranges to speak to the students from each program independently, and then communicates back to the unit any matters that bear attention, approaching it as a challenge for both the graduate office and the unit. Offers of help are usually highly valued by the unit. Another model of good practice is in the form of the Graduate Dean who asks the students to put their concerns in writing and then discusses these with the program. Good Practice also occurs when units themselves work out ways to involve students; however, it is important that this not be simply left to chance but rather that guidance from the Graduate School be proffered to the unit under review.

(b) The Data

Another important, if not increasingly crucial, component of the self-study pertains to the availability, quality and sharing of data. There are models of good practice identifiable in this area as well. Many of the institutions in Ontario are moving toward centralized systems where all student and faculty data required for the brief can be pulled in a consistent format from the central system and presented to the departments in table format. These tables provide information by program (and in some cases by field) on graduation rates, times to completion, student financial assistance, student publications, student employment outcomes, faculty course loads, publications and research funding. Good Practice begins when the Dean and Department Head (or the Self-Evaluation Committee) are able to sit down and seriously consider the data. This places them in an ideal position to discuss changes that may be useful or necessary.

When one considers the whole exercise of data collection, there is increasing pressure on the institutions to have accurate, complete and consistent data that are readily accessible. It also becomes increasingly important that some parts of the institution which have tended to operate as silos begin to communicate with each

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7 Some universities actually have a standing committee consisting of the dean, vice dean, assistant dean, and two faculty (whenever possible former members of the Appraisal Committee) that review and consider the information closely. Individuals take a lead on the programs and in conferring with the Chair and/or Graduate Coordinator.
other, share rather than hoard information, and to thereby ensure that the data is the “best and most accurate.” It is no longer sufficient to have departments collecting their own data, in varied formats and with varying levels of competence or ability, and then providing it (or perhaps not providing it) when called upon. Some universities have moved to hire their own data expert within the graduate school, whose function it is to work with the institutional analysts and the central system to both collect the kind of data needed and to be able to extract that information easily and quickly. Departments are extremely grateful for this and a great deal of time, frustration and effort on the part of the units can be avoided. Departments are then freer to concentrate on other important matters concerning curriculum, focus, field, faculty needs, future directions and so on. This is not to suggest that the data should go unnoticed and uncritically examined by the unit and the Graduate School – in fact the reverse is true; the data are a crucial part of the self-study and should be analyzed with care. But the overriding point is that inconsistencies and errors in data collection soon lead to loss of credibility and ineffective arguments for change.

While the above has been cited as a good practice, it is in many ways an “Ideal”. In reality, there are a number of graduate schools located within universities in Ontario that do not yet have a well-established central system, or one that is set up to accept and provide all the data needed for the graduate enterprise. Some of these have established, as an alternative form of good practice, their own database and provided it to the units and the program assistants. The key to good data maintenance in these cases is training by the graduate school for the Program Assistants (whether they be housed within the graduate school or in the departments) so that the data is collected in a consistent and systematic format. The data then need to be compared to any data in the central system for consistency and accuracy.

During the self-study, data is frequently provided to departments on other programs as well. This sharing of data is another good practice within the institution which can lead to healthy competition among the departments internally and between university programs, with each unit trying to maximize its contribution and achievements. In some cases, where departments are functioning like islands within the bigger system, one improvement can be that they start sharing their experiences and expertise. They come to know, recognize and document their achievements and practices and develop initiatives that lead to a new synergy. The role of Graduate Dean in exercising good practice in these areas can be as a facilitator, a coach, and an advocate for new initiatives by providing information and clarifying any issues that arise. It is also an opportunity for him or her to explore the fields in the program and determine where and if changes might be desirable.

If the self-study has not been thorough, the assessment team will likely have surprises for the institution. The outcome of a good self-study facilitates a good external assessment. As noted by Stella, if the various components of an
institution can work together for a few months to thoughtfully project themselves to a team of external reviewers that will visit for two to three days, it indicates to the reviewer that the program has the capability of fostering a spirit that leads the department to continuous self-review and improvement.” This is crucial to the determination of a “winning” practice!

OCGS has taken on the role of self-regulation for the graduate programs in the Ontario universities as the guardians of the Appraisal Process. However, because the context and environment in which the Dean of Graduate Studies exists varies, there is more than one model of Good Practice. It is understood that the organizational structure very much affects the relationship that the Dean has with the power base and resource allocation. Most Graduate Deans spoke of the value they place on the relationship they hold with the Vice-President Academic, the Faculty Deans and in some cases with the Academic Council. Much of the development of programs can be started and sometimes even achieved at the self-assessment stage and is often a dimension of this relationship. In some universities, of course, resource changes frequently are achieved through other processes, independent of the OCGS review, and it is understood that the complexity of the strategies being adopted is a function of the internal dynamics. In spite of these variable structures, it would seem reasonable to posit that the self-assessment can frequently be used for one or more of the following purposes:

1. To strengthen the internal quality assurance mechanisms of institutions;
2. To facilitate self-improvement in the overall quality of higher education;
3. To stimulate continuous improvement;
4. To stimulate institutional planning and systematic evaluation;
5. To lead to the realization of ownership for quality;
6. To monitor internal quality;
7. To clarify the mission, goals and objectives of the program and institution;
8. To reach beyond systemic constraints;
9. To increase program options;
10. To restructure the curriculum, fields;
11. To stimulate a research culture;
12. To improve documentation and the use of information technology;
13. To improve student support service;
14. To improve staff quality;
15. To improve faculty development of programs;
16. To create greater unity among members and at the same time healthy competition among sub-units;
17. To rediscover strengths and potentials;
18. To trigger healthy practices;
19. To make changes in policies and practices of the management; and
20. To improve resource allocation for academic activities;

These aspects of review processes are seen as having a direct bearing on the enhancement of quality and can all be achieved as a major aspect of the appraisal

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9 Stella, A: ibid.: 119
process rather than a casual by-product if approached strategically with the collaborative model. In other words, the institution as the prime beneficiary of the appraisal, benefits from the assessment as intended in the mandate of OCGS.

On the other hand, it might be useful to note there are some, as may be expected, “not so good practices” that do not lead to such positive assessment outcomes” Let us briefly consider just a few of those.

IV. Not So Good Practice

In spite of all the potential benefits described above, some departments, or even institutions, simply comply with the expectations of the OCGS quality assurance process, resulting in a culture of ‘compliance’ rather than continuous enhancement, and potentially a less collaborative and more adversarial approach. The author has been told of some cases where this seems to be the fundamental ethos among departments. As suggested in the earlier part of the paper, OCGS may provide the initial impetus for self-review, but to consolidate enhancement there needs to be a sense of an internal, intrinsic motivation within institutions to improve or alter what they do (Woodhouse and Middlehurst, 1995)

One such example of a “not-so-good practice is illustrated in the following situation:

Case X:

One of the departments at one of the universities decided to use the OCGS appraisals process to fight with the university administration for more resources and faculty positions (an adversarial approach). The head of the program felt that the evaluation would help him to convince the administration about the needs of the department through voicing their complaints in the brief and to the consultants. However, when the final recommendation was announced, the Dean and the Department were both upset about the less than positive outcome (The program was conditionally approved ) and said that, having understood the problems faced by the institution, OCGS should have given the institution a “better grade.”

The Appraisal Committee, however, while sympathetic to university constraints, must make its decision on the basis of the evidence presented to it. The department, in its efforts to manipulate the process, placed itself in jeopardy and the dean, by not exercising his role in the most responsible way, allowed it to happen. In my research, it became evident that deans normally guide departments away from such an adversarial approach. They encourage honesty, but not the airing of dirty laundry or tactics that are meant to get at the administration but in the final analysis lead to an unhappy outcome for the program itself. The positive approach of the dean and her office is clearly critical to the success (or non-success) of the review.

Other situations that may lead to poor practice arise from misconceptions about OCGS (which are not unknown!). For example, some see OCGS as “the watchdogs that are making sure the universities don’t trip up”. Some faculty still see administration as their “natural enemy,” and the fight ensues. In the final analysis, this appraisal review is much more successful as a collaborative process. While it is understood that
a sharpening of incentives for quality seems to require a reasonable degree of competition in the pursuit of goals identified with quality. Universities compete and should compete. They compete for the best faculty, the best students, the most funds, and the best learning environment.\textsuperscript{10}

good quality also requires a reasonable degree of collaboration among and within universities. This collaboration is to be distinguished from collusion that results in monopolistic practices to the detriment of students and other users of the services of universities. This collaboration should be based on the more effective use of resources that can be achieved through the combination of teaching, research and administrative matters. As Dr. Ian Clark of the Council on Ontario Universities pointed out in a recent paper delivered to an Oxford Roundtable and referred to earlier in the Smith Report,

\begin{quote}
Ontario universities have long functioned in an environment of greater autonomy and lower regulatory burdens than is the case for universities in many other jurisdictions. Such conditions help foster competition. At the same time, Ontario universities have been highly collaborative in undertaking more common services and self-regulation than is the case for universities in many other jurisdictions. An appropriate competitive and collaborative balance is a key factor in determining the degree of quality universities can achieve with given resource constraints.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

The OCGS as a collective need to promote and focus on the positive elements of the process – both internal and external. To assist in this exercise, OCGS can facilitate the universities’ efforts by enabling the institutions to develop their capacity to build on their own quality enhancement strategies. The Good Practice Study has been an excellent opportunity for this kind of facilitation and collaboration.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{10} Smith, David C \textit{How will I know if there is Quality?}” Report on Quality Indicators and Quality Enhancement in Universities: Issues and Experiences COU March 2000

\textsuperscript{11} Smith, David C. 2000: ibid 31
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This paper begins a process of examining the underlying epistemological relations between quality, standards and quality assurance. It outlines the nature of the epistemological framework being used, examines the purposes and approaches to quality assurance, examines different conceptions of quality and differentiates them from notions of standards. The paper specifies the interrelationships between quality, standards and purposes and approaches to quality assurance and then examines specific nodes to draw out the epistemological underpinning. This in itself is a relatively unusual examination but the paper also draws out, in embryo, the implementation and impact implications from the epistemological analysis. A later stage, and one not attempted in this paper, is to identify the learning theories that articulate with the epistemological analysis of quality.

**Epistemology**

There are different ways of classifying epistemological perspectives in the social sciences and no way has universal agreement. Drawing on well-established analyses of the theory of the nature of knowledge, the following tri-partite framework is used: positivism, phenomenology and critical-dialectical understanding.

**Positivism**

Positivism encompasses our taken-for-granted view of scientific knowledge. It asserts that science *explains* the observable world through identifying cause-and-effect relationships. Positivism assumes that we only know about something if we can apprehend it through our senses and explain what caused it.

The positivist approach is widely used in social science, taking various forms including attempts to provide causal laws, identifying possible causal factors and testing theoretical statements against observable evidence. The presumption is that cause-and-effect science is objective and value-free.

**Phenomenology**

Phenomenology asserts that we know social processes if we can *interpret* what they *mean*. Phenomenology, unlike positivism, sees the study of the social world as fundamentally different to the study of the natural world. This is because the social world is made up of acting, thinking subjects whose actions require interpretation. People are not things, they think and reflect on what they do. The social world has meaning for social actors. Thus, to know the social world, it is necessary to discover these meanings.
Phenomenological methodology is concerned with interpreting the world rather than explaining it. Phenomenologists tend to reject the idea that external truths about the social world can be exposed by using the methods of the natural sciences. Social actors cannot be treated as though their actions are mere reflexes of external causes: people are conscious and make decisions about how they will act.

**Critical-dialectical**

The critical-dialectical approach constructs alternative, situated, *understandings* of the social world. It attempts to go beneath surface appearance by questioning taken-for-granted views of the social world (Marx, 1887; Harvey, 1990). Critical social research is an alternative to positivistic and phenomenological approaches.

A critical-dialectical epistemological perspective argues that while it is important to see the social world as made up of reflective people it is also important to remember that they are situated in a specific historical and socio-economic context. To know the world we must look at how people are limited in what they do and think by the nature of the social world in which they live.

Critical-dialectical understanding does not come from breaking social events or structures down into causally-related component parts. On the contrary, understanding comes from seeing things as a whole and placing social events in their wider social and political setting. Nor does critical-dialectical understanding come from *interpreting* social interaction because, again, focussing on the process of interaction without taking the wider context into account is too limited.

Critical-dialectical understanding comes about by deconstructing prevailing knowledge, preconceptions and ideology and reconstructing an alternative understanding. The critique of ideology is not value neutral and critical-dialectical analysis engages with politics.

These three epistemological positions embody different positions on objectivity. Positivism argues that only ‘objective’ knowledge counts as scientific knowledge; phenomenology and critical dialectical understanding accept the theory-laden nature of observation (Chalmers, 2004), which argues that the concept of objectivity is illusory because facts do not exist in isolation of theories that frame them.

**Quality assurance purposes**

Four purposes (or rationales (Harvey and Newton, 2005)) have been identified for external quality assurance in the higher education setting: accountability, control, compliance and improvement.
Accountability

Accountability is about institutions taking responsibility for the service they provide and the public money they spend. Accountability has been the dominant underlying rationale for introducing quality evaluation.

Higher education in most countries has to demonstrate its worth and to account for its use of public resources in the face of competition for state funds. This notion of accountability is compatible with the value-for-money definition of quality (see discussion of the concept of quality, below).

A second aspect of accountability is to students: assurance that the programme of study is organised and run properly, and that an appropriate educational experience is both promised and delivered. This accountability notion is consistent, when the focus is on service delivery, with a fitness-for-purpose definition of quality or, when linked to inputs to an excellence definition. When the focus is on the learning process, then it comes closer to a transformation definition of quality.

A third accountability purpose of quality evaluation procedures is the generation of public information that funders can use to aid funding allocation decisions and prospective students and graduate recruiters can use to inform choice. This accountability concern is commensurate with excellent definitions of quality when choice is based on hierarchical analysis and with fitness-for-purpose when based on appropriateness for a specific end, or on a transformation definition when based on suitability of delivery and learning environment.

Control

Control is about ensuring the integrity of the higher education sector, in particular making it difficult for poor or rogue providers to continue operating and making access to the sector dependent on the fulfilment of criteria of adequacy.

In many countries, especially those with a significant private sector, governments seek to control unrestrained growth in higher education in an increasingly unrestricted market (Harvey, 2002; Rosa and Amaral, 2005). They may do this via financial controls or ministerial decree but increasingly quality monitoring and accreditation are being used to restrict market-led expansion.

Linked to this is the perceived need to ensure the status and standing and legitimacy of higher education. External review is used to ensure that the principles and practices of higher education are not being eroded or flouted, thereby undermining the intrinsic quality of university-level education and research.

The control aspect of quality evaluation specifically addresses the comparability of standards: that is the standard or level of student academic or professional achievement, nationally and internationally. Attempts have been made to ‘benchmark’ academic standards including: externally-set and marked examinations; specification of the content
of syllabuses; (threshold) descriptors of outcomes; external examiners to ensure interinstitutional comparability of awards. The use of external examiners, for example, is well established in some countries as a means of making comparisons between programmes within subject disciplines.

Compliance

*Compliance* is ensuring that institutions adopt procedures, practices and policies that are considered by funders and governments to be desirable for the proper conduct of the sector and to ensure its quality. Government expectations include various forms of compliance that go beyond financial accountability and include the achievement of policy objectives. Governments place increasing emphasis on securing specified outputs and outcomes from publicly-funded activities in response to community expectations about improving service quality and policy effectiveness (PA Consulting, 2000).

There are other stakeholders who seek compliance through quality monitoring, notably professional or regulatory bodies who may use quality monitoring to check that their preferences or policies are being acknowledged or implemented. At its simplest level, quality monitoring has encouraged, or even forced, compliance in the production of information, be it statistical data, prospectuses, or course documents.

In addition, there is pressure to ensure comparability of provision and procedures, within and between institutions, including international comparisons.

Improvement

The *improvement* purpose, sometimes also referred to as enhancement, is less about constraint and more about the encouragement of adjustment and change. Most systems of external review claim to encourage improvement, however it has been a secondary feature of most systems, especially at the initial stage. As systems move into second or third phases, the improvement element has been given more attention. (Sweden and Finland are unusual in starting with improvement).

However, do external quality assurance processes set out to improve academic or research quality? Or is the aim to improve standards? Is the purpose to directly improve the student experience or is it to improve the way the institution monitors its own activities? Or is improvement about transparency and the provision of programme documentation and outcomes information?

The improvement function of quality assurance procedures is normally about encouraging institutions to reflect upon their practices, with a view to enabling a process of continuous improvement of the learning process and the range of outcomes.
Quality assurance approaches

There are four broad types of quality assurance processes although the methods adopted extensively overlap. The four are accreditation, audit, assessment and standards checking. The distinction between the first three are well rehearsed (see Harvey, 2004–6), the latter category, for this paper, includes external examination of academic achievement or professional competence and performance indicators or student evaluations of service provision (see discussion on standards, below).

It should be noted that the processes of quality assurance are quite separate from the concept of quality. Quality is to quality assurance what intelligence is to IQ tests. Quality provides the conceptual underpinning for quality assurance processes. However, when the term quality is mentioned in higher educational circles it is often taken as shorthand for quality assurance processes. This unhelpful conflation is reproduced in the UNESCO definition of quality in higher education:

*Quality (Academic)*: Quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional, multi-level, and dynamic concept that relates to the contextual settings of an educational model, to the institutional mission and objectives, as well as to specific standards within a given system, institution, programme, or discipline. (Vlăsceanu *et al.*, 2004, p. 46)

The four purposes and the four broad approaches to quality assurance intersect (Diagram 1) providing 16 potential alternatives (space prohibits examination of these here).
Although there tends to be an aversion in the quality literature to the definition of quality (although not its measurement!), to make headway on exploring the epistemology of quality and its relationship to learning it is necessary to examine the various definitions of quality and to distinguish them from standards and from so-called quality standards. The analysis in ‘Defining Quality’ (Harvey and Green, 1993), which has been widely quoted and adapted, is updated in ‘Understanding Quality’, a contribution for the Bologna Handbook (Harvey, 2006). These definitions, briefly reprised below (Table 1), are used to examine the epistemological basis of quality.
Definitions of quality

Table 1: Definitions of quality and standards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceptional</td>
<td>A traditional concept linked to the idea of ‘excellence’, usually operationalised as exceptionally high standards of academic achievement. Quality is achieved if the standards are surpassed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfection or consistency</td>
<td>Focuses on process and sets specifications that it aims to meet. Quality in this sense is summed up by the interrelated ideas of zero defects and getting things right first time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness for purpose</td>
<td>Judges quality in terms of the extent to which a product or service meets its stated purpose. The purpose may be customer-defined to meet requirements or (in education) institution-defined to reflect institutional mission (or course objectives).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NB: There are some who suggest that ‘fitness of purpose’ is a definition of quality but it is a specification of parameters of fitness and not itself a definition of the quality concept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value for money</td>
<td>Assesses quality in terms of return on investment or expenditure. At the heart of the value-for-money approach in education is the notion of accountability. Public services, including education, are expected to be accountable to the funders. Increasingly, students are also considering their own investment in higher education in value-for-money terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation</td>
<td>Sees quality as a process of change, which in higher education adds value to students through their learning experience. Education is not a service for a customer but an ongoing process of transformation of the participant. This leads to two notions of transformative quality in education: enhancing the consumer and empowering the consumer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standards

| Academic standards    | The demonstrated ability to meet specified level of academic attainment. For pedagogy, the ability of students to be able to do those things designated as appropriate at a given level of education. Usually, the measured competence of an individual in attaining specified (or implied) course aims and objectives, operationalised via performance on assessed pieces of work. For research, the ability to undertake effective scholarship or produce new knowledge, which is assessed via peer recognition. |
| Standards of competence | Demonstration that a specified level of ability on a range of competencies has been achieved. Competencies may include general transferable skills required by employers; academic ('higher level') skills implicit or explicit in the attainment of degree status or in a post-graduation academic apprenticeship; particular abilities congruent with induction into a profession. |
| Service standards     | Are measures devised to assess identified elements of the service provided against specified benchmarks? Elements assessed include activities of service providers and facilities within which the service takes place. Benchmarks specified in ‘contracts’ such as student charters tend to be quantified and restricted to measurable items. Post hoc measurement of customer opinions (satisfaction) is used as indicators of service provision. Thus, service standards in higher education parallel consumer standards. |
| Organisational standards | Attainment of formal recognition of systems to ensure effective management of organisational processes and clear dissemination of organisational practices. |

Source: adapted from Harvey, 1995

Quality as exceptional or as excellence

The first notion of quality sees it as something special or exceptional. There are three variations on this.

First, a traditional notion of quality that implies exclusivity. Quality is based on an assumption that distinctiveness or inaccessibility of, for example, an élite Oxbridge education is of itself ‘quality’. Quality is apodictic, not judged against any criteria. The traditional concept provides no definable means of determining quality. Where it assured at all it is through devices such as reputational league tables (such as, Times Higher Education Supplement international rating tables).

Second, exceeding high standards or excellence. Excellence is often used interchangeably with quality. Unlike the traditional notion excellence provides (input and output) benchmarks against which ‘high’ standards can be evaluated. This is not to say the benchmark standards are objective but they have the potential to specify the
components of excellence. Assuring excellent academic standards can only be done through a system of standards monitoring, such as an external examiner system or a peer process, such as a research assessment exercise or direct assessment of teaching (usually resisted). Student feedback might provide an indirect measure of the latter. In practice, assuring exceptional service standards tends to be input driven, with an assumption that good facilities and well-qualified staff will result in good service to students.

Third, checking standards: rather than difficult to attain, the checks are based on attainable criteria that are designed to ensure minimum standards. This corresponds with what have been described as ‘threshold definitions’ of quality, or in some cases, ‘benchmark quality’ (implying minimum benchmarks rather than the ‘excellence benchmarks’ discussed above) or minimum ‘quality standards’. The threshold standards approach to quality implies that quality is improved if thresholds are raised. Accreditation schemes are intended to provide a judgement on threshold standards: either existing or potential.

**Quality as perfection or consistency**

Quality as perfection or consistency involves a shift from outcome standards measurement to process standards, with a focus on reliability. There are two aspects to this: zero defects and quality culture.

The zero defects approach to quality replaces the emphasis on exclusivity with one that makes quality accessible for all (Halpin, 1966, Crosby, 1979). Quality is defined as conformance to specification, which requires outcomes to be delivered consistently. Arguably, zero defects approach requires a quality culture where everyone takes responsibility for quality and strives to prevent errors at each stage of the process rather than detect errors at a final inspection stage.

It has been suggested that this approach to quality has no relevance to higher education because there is no intention to produce identical graduates or research outcomes. However, there is a need to have flawless information systems and reliable and consistent student grading and research assessment processes, not to mention reliable student support services.

Quality as perfection/consistency turns quality into a relative concept. There are no absolutes against which the output can be assessed, no universal benchmarks; quality is gauged by consistency of specified provision. The underlying quality culture reflects the idea of delegated responsibility. A quality culture requires a facilitative managerial infrastructure alongside a trusting delegation of the academic process to those who directly engage with teaching or research.

There is little formal attempt to evaluate or assure consistency in provision in higher education as this tends to apply mostly to service and organisational standards rather than academic ones. A key mechanism for evaluating or assuring consistency in student
grading or learning support is feedback from students and staff. Quality audit or assessment processes indirectly address the consistency of student grading, although this is not a principal task. Audit may also comment on the reliability of administrative process. In essence, the assuring of consistency is in the hands of staff and students.

Consistency of organisational standards is quality assured through mechanisms such as ISO9000 or similar certification, which focuses on the codification of processes to ensure that errors are not made.

**Quality as fitness for/of purpose**

Quality is also defined as fitness for purpose of a product or service. Fitness for purpose equates quality with the fulfilment of a specification or stated outcomes. Quality is thus judged by the extent to which the product or service fits a stated purpose.

Although apparently straightforward in conception, ‘fitness for purpose’ is deceptive (Moodie, 1986), for it raises the issues of ‘whose purpose?’ and ‘how is fitness assessed?’ For some, the objectives are set externally and fitness for purpose becomes compliance. For others, the purpose is a more contentious issue and the notion of fitness of purpose has been introduced to evaluate whether the quality-related intentions of an organisation are adequate.

Where fitness for purpose opened up the possibility of inclusive quality, as every product and service has the potential to fit its purpose and thus be a quality product or service, fitness of purpose closed down inclusivity, as there are external determinants of what is acceptable as a quality criterion. Fitness of purpose is not used as a definition of quality as it simply specifies the purpose rather than engages with the quality concept.

Broadly, fitness for purpose offers two alternative priorities for specifying purpose. The first puts the onus on the customer, and is concerned with meeting customer specifications. Higher education tends to avoid this approach. Instead, it adopts a mission-based fitness for purpose which links specification to institutional mission. Mission-based fitness for purpose reflects approaches that see quality as about anticipating needs.

Fitness for purpose of academic standards is assured through quality assessment procedures. In theory, this is done by the institution demonstrating it fits either externally-prescribed standards (such as those specified by a regulatory or professional body) or its own objectives, as specified, for example, in its values and mission statement. Fitness for purpose of academic standards is also judged, indirectly, through accreditation schemes, which again assure minimum compliance to externally-imposed standards, such as those prescribed by a professional body. In all of this, there is no direct attempt to fit student requirements; students as customer are presumed to be well served by the mediators of fitness of purpose, viz. professional bodies, quality assurance agencies or government departments.

Fitness-for-purpose-based quality assurance approaches are designed to evaluate institutional mission fulfilment but despite the intention, all quality assurance systems
have an overlay of generic requirements. In short, the institution or programme is not solely judged on its ability to fulfil its mission but on whether it complies with national, governmental, disciplinary, professional or other (threshold) expectations.

Standards

There are four realms of standards in higher education: academic, competence, service, and organisational (Table 1). They relate to different conceptions of quality and there are preferred approaches for each node (Table 2)

Table 2: Relationship between quality and standards in higher education and means of assurance (items in parentheses are indirect assurance mechanisms)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Academic standards</th>
<th>Standards of competence</th>
<th>Service standards</th>
<th>Organisational standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exceptional</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasis on summative assessment of knowledge and, implicitly, some ‘higher-level’ skills. Implicit normative gold standard. Comparative evaluation of research output. Elitism: the presupposition of a need to maintain pockets of high quality and standards in a mass education system.</td>
<td>Linked to professional competence; emphasis mainly on traditional demarcation between knowledge and (professional) skills.</td>
<td>Input-driven assumptions of resource-linked service/facilities. Good facilities, well-qualified staff, etc. ‘guarantee’ service standards. Reluctance to expose professional (teaching) competence to scrutiny.</td>
<td>Clear role hierarchy reflecting academic status and experience. Often a heavy emphasis on ‘traditional values’. Strong emphasis on autonomy and academic freedom. Aversion to transparency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfection or consistency</td>
<td>A target level of academic standard is consistently achieved (year on year).</td>
<td>Expectation of a minimum prescribed level of professional competence. Problem in assessing for ‘zero defects’.</td>
<td>Primarily relates to reliable and consistent student grading and to administrative processes, such as accuracy and reliability of record keeping, timetables, coursework arrangements.</td>
<td>Right first time. Document procedures, regulations and good practice. Obtain ISO9000 certification.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assured by: (Standards monitoring)</td>
<td>Assured by: Standards monitoring (Accreditation)</td>
<td>Assured by: Participant/user feedback (Audit) (Assessment)</td>
<td>Assured by: External QM certification (Accreditation)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness for purpose (Fitness of purpose)</td>
<td>Theoretically, standards should relate to the defined objectives that relate to the purpose of the course (or institution). Summative assessment should be criteria referenced, although as purposes often include a comparative element (e.g., in mission statement) these are mediated by norm-referenced criteria.</td>
<td>Explicit specification of skills and abilities related to objectives. Evidence required to at least identify threshold standards. Professional competence primarily assessed in terms of threshold minimums against professional body requirements for practice. This is similar to excellence approaches to checking minimum standards.</td>
<td>The purpose involves the provision of a service. Thus, process is assessed via (minimum) standards for the purpose — usually teaching competence, the link between teaching and research, student support (academic and non-academic), other facilities. Purpose is, for students, often judged against expectations.</td>
<td>Ensure appropriate mechanisms in place to assess whether practices and procedures fit the stated mission-based purposes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assured by: Assessment (Accreditation)</td>
<td>Assured by: Standards monitoring (Accreditation) (Subject assessment)</td>
<td>Assured by: Customer charters/ surveys (Accountability audit) (Assessment) (Accreditation)</td>
<td>Assured by: Institutional accountability audit</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A note on quality standards

Quality and standards are different: the former is essentially about process and the latter refer to the level (grading) of the outcome. ‘Quality standards’, so-called, are confusing because they are expected norms against which process quality and outcome standards are measured (as in the European Standards and Guidelines, (ENQA 2005)). The analogy would be a golf score. The way the player tackles the course would be the quality of the play, the number of strokes the player takes would be the standard and the par score for the course (the number of strokes a good player is expected to take) would be the quality standard.
As noted above, accountability for public money is a central aspect of quality assurance processes. Methods to ensure this revolve significantly, although not exclusively, around standards checking, through the use of performance indicators on issues such as retention and completion, graduate employment statistics and research assessment exercises, often linked to financial constraints or rewards and clearly highlighting value for money of the service provided and the academic and competence levels achieved. The value for money notion of quality is about getting as much as possible for a given expenditure or a specified amount by spending as little as possible. There is an underlying causal relationship: cutbacks and efficiency savings can reduce costs. For the academic this may be seen to result in poorer quality and thus outcomes, for the politician this results in the same outcomes and only the ‘slack’ in the system is removed. In either event, the analysis is fundamentally a cause and effect analysis.
Compliance with professional requirements

Another aim of quality assurance is to ensure that professional standards are maintained. This, in effect, involves compliance with professional body (or other organisation’s) requirements or norms, usually relating to the competence of graduates. A preferred mode of checking this is accreditation, usually with a focus on inputs, such as facilities, curricula and staffing, sometimes supported by a history of appropriate outputs. Again, this is underpinned by a positivist epistemology, an explicit view that complying with requirements will result in competent graduates, a process that can be checked through measurable, observable variables.

Compliance with quality assurance agency requirements

Although quality assurance agencies set out requirements of the assurance process, the intention is initially to be helpful and guide institutions through the process of self-reflection and review, with the purpose, as has been shown of making institutions accountable, controlling activities, complying to government requirements or improving the learning and research. Compliance to the agency requirements themselves is not a fundamental purpose of quality assurance but evolves into a process in its own right, sometimes overshadowing the underlying purposes. The audit or assessment process, for example, designed to explore the fitness-for-purpose of the academic processes involves certain steps, which in the main are additional to, and sometimes do not mesh well with, the normal academic practice. The result has often been a peripheral engagement in the process by academic staff and students, characterised by performance and ‘game playing’. The process can be demotivating and perceived as burdensome or, in some cases, by encouraging well-structured self-reflection can be motivating and inspiring. In any event, the quality assurance requirements and its implementation depend on the meanings that key actors attach to the process. As such, compliance with agency requirements is phenomenological.

Improvement of learning: empowering learners

One aspect of quality assurance is improvement of the learning process. When this is informed by a transformation view of quality with radical views of learner-focused or autonomous learning, then the role and nature of the teacher and the privileged position of discipline knowledge starts to be deconstructed. This also moves to the hazy hinterland of quality assurance processes as none of the existing systems does more than nod in the direction of transformative learning. Not surprisingly, quality assurance processes are uncomfortable with this fundamentally critical-dialectical approach because there are no simple indicators, no self-evident or taken-for-granted and easily assimilated criteria for judging how students are empowered as critical reflective learners.
Why bother?

Apart from identifying that there is a myriad of different intersections of quality, standards, quality assurance purposes and approaches, why is examining the epistemological basis of quality important.

First, it reveals the fundamental underlying differences in quality issues. Quality and quality assurance are not homogeneous and, for example, a fitness-for-purpose approach is not adequate, nor even appropriate, for evaluating many quality issues. What an epistemological analysis does, as hinted at by the examples, is to draw attention to the way that we construct quality as knowledge. It differentiates reductionist causal explanations from interpretation of meanings of actors from socio-historically specific deconstructed and reconstructed alternative understandings.

Second, these diffuse perspectives also have a bearing on the implementation process, which ultimately transforms policy into practice. Without wanting to be overly prescriptive, there is a tendency for positivist approaches to be associated with top-down implementation procedures. Similarly, phenomenology is characterised by bottom-up procedures and critical-dialectical by iterative approaches to implementation.

All of this is further reflected in the impact of quality assurance. There is little enough impact analysis but most of it, not surprisingly, implicitly adopts a positivist model. Impact is equated with cause and effect. Not only are there severe methodological problems of identifying causal factors, there are fundamental epistemological debates about relevance of a reductionist causal model as against a phenomenological approach or a critical-dialectical one. This is compounded by trying to link the above analysis to learning theory: an issue that was hinted at in the final example above but which is beyond the scope of this introductory paper.

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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Outcomes and Theory of Quality Assurance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Quality Convergence Study II: An Attempt to Initiate and Epistemological Approach to Quality Assurance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presenters</td>
<td>Fiona Crozier, QAA</td>
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<td>Fabrice Hénard, CNE</td>
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</tbody>
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The Quality convergence Study II presented hereafter has been published both in English and in French. It is part of an ENQA report which encloses another study on the terminology of quality assurance based on an ENQA workshop hold in Warwick in June 2006.

The whole report is available at: http://www.enqa.eu/files/terminology_v01.pdf
Final report on the pilot Quality Convergence II project:¹
Promoting epistemological approaches to quality assurance

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1. Introduction
The Quality Convergence Study II (QCS II) built upon the successful outcomes of QCS I. QCS II was intended to provide further stimulus to ENQA member agencies in their discussions and implementation of capacity building. The main outcome from QCS I was the conclusion that, rather than, or perhaps before, the development of common methods of working, it was important to further develop a real understanding of the national contexts within which the quality assurance agencies work. There is a need to develop an understanding that goes beyond how the quality assurance agencies do things, and leads to a comprehension of why the agencies work as they do.

QCS II operated within the context of a continuing debate on how agencies might work together, whether this is at the level of furthering mutual understanding or seeking mutual recognition of the outcomes of evaluations. It was an attempt to question the foundations of quality assurance in higher education.

Initiatives for the further development of the European dimension of quality assurance (QA) in higher education (HE) such as the publication of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), the TEEP II project and the Nordic Network project on the implications of implementing the ESG in the Nordic countries, were also taken under consideration in the QCS II. This was because these initiatives too, focussed on working together, or on the implications of a European-wide set of agreed principles. The project team also read with interest the outcomes of a survey on ENQA membership criteria, and noted the work being carried out by ECA member agencies in terms of mutual recognition of accreditation decisions.

In particular, the pilot project considered the discussion which developed during the ENQA seminar on the language of quality assurance held at Warwick, in the United Kingdom, in June 2006. This seminar confirmed that, in addition to the problems which arise from the use of a single working language (English), it is necessary, in parallel, to examine and discuss the values, often implicit, that underpin the work done at the individual agencies.

The idea that underpins QCS II is that only a deeper shared understanding of those values will help to overcome any misunderstandings. In the opinion of the project team,
the recognition of the importance of what lies beneath the surface in agencies’ work is essential to the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). What is regarded as beyond question in one country may not be regarded as such in another. If it is implicit in the modus operandi of one agency and therefore not discussed, a second agency may simply believe that it is of no importance. Thus, in the case of processes that are, on the surface similar, there is an assumption that the outcomes of the processes are the same. Working relationships within ENQA are constantly confronted with these unspoken and intercultural dimensions.

The QCS II project chose to work towards understanding the values that underpin QA, in order to help provide better insight and inform capacity building between and within agencies.

2. Methodology and timescale
This pilot project ran over a period of one year (January to December 2006). It was guided by two agencies, CNE and QAA, who set up a steering group composed of Fiona Crozier (QAA), Bruno Curvale (CNE) and Fabrice Hénard (CNE).

The method consisted of inviting the ENQA member agencies to react and respond to four notions2 which are usually present in any discourse about QA in higher education: independence, peer review, transparency and results. The main phases of the method were:

- the agreement of the four notions and the development of a questionnaire (attached at annex B) about those notions (April to June 2006),
- a consultation period when the questionnaires were sent to all member agencies of ENQA (July to October 2006),
- analysis of the completed questionnaires (October to November 2006) and
- the writing of a report (November to December 2006).

It was agreed that the results of the questionnaire should not be published – the aim of the project was not to debate whether or not responses were good or bad, right or wrong, nor to comment on perceived good practice, but to consider the conditions, feasibility and interest in an epistemological debate amongst QA practitioners.

The steering group was supported in its work by four experts chosen for their academic background (Philosophy, History, Social Sciences) and because they represented different areas of Europe (Bulgaria, France, Portugal and UK). All are academics with some knowledge of QA in their national context. It was a deliberate decision not to have a QA expert on the panel; this role was fulfilled by the three members of the steering group. Working with such a group of experts proved to be a real success and greatly enriched the project.

The input of the experts and their interest in the project was invaluable to the steering group. The experts agreed that the decision to focus on four notions (independence, peer review, transparency and results), and to ask agencies to concentrate on the values that underpinned those themes or notions in their context was a good approach. They were involved in the design of the questionnaire that

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2 For the purposes of this project, the word “notion” refers to a concept or idea that is common to many European models of QA in HE, for example, peer review. The word “value” is used to discuss the values that underpin the four notions on which the questionnaire was based.
was subsequently sent to all agencies, and they assisted in the analysis of the results. The discussions between the experts and the steering group at the two meetings held were both interesting and challenging. It was very useful for the project group to be confronted with the alternative and challenging views of HE and QA in HE that were raised by the experts.

The outcomes reported below should be viewed with caution: they emerged from the reactions to and reflections on the responses to the questionnaire of a small group of people (the experts and the steering group).

3. The responses to the questionnaire
Thirteen agencies and the evaluation unit of the European University Association responded to the questionnaire; this represents 47% of agencies that regularly participate in ENQA activities (the list of respondents is attached as annex A).

The development of the questionnaire and the responses to it provided both steering group members and experts with an opportunity for reflection: this was also true for the experts. Mutual comprehension between QA agencies and HEIs needs to be worked at and projects of this type offer the opportunity to interact positively.

For example, the experts brought to the project their own perceptions of QA. They did not only react to the agencies’ responses, but also to what they perceived to be missing or unsaid. The members of the steering group were thus confronted not only with what might be implicit within their own national context but also with what is unquestioned or implicit across agencies as a whole. This reinforces the idea that it is important for agencies to explain more clearly, to HE providers and the public in general, their objectives and their approach to quality through the processes they develop.

The experts were surprised by some of the things that they perceived to be “unsaid” or unimportant, whereas for the steering group, sometimes these things were implicitly understood. It is often these implicit values that are used by agencies to underpin their argument.

For example, some agencies did not mention that their methodologies are the result of a process of dialogue and consensus between them and their stakeholders, with the result that the experts thought that such agencies used their procedures as a justification for their actions. In fact, such debate is a positive feature of the modus operandi of the agencies concerned.

A more systematic approach to discussion or reflection would allow agencies to improve their position in a national or international debate on QA in HE. Indeed, the experts were of the opinion that the responses to the questionnaires were often defensive and that the agencies should be more self-confident, as they felt that this is one of the conditions necessary for a robust debate between partners/stakeholders.

The four notions proposed – independence, peer evaluation, transparency and results – are integral to the various models of QA found in the European context. The debate with the experts allowed for the questioning of these notions.

3.1 INDEPENDENCE
This notion attracted the most detailed responses. Independence is at the heart of the majority of agencies in terms of the justification of their legitimacy (an issue dealt with in detail later in this report). However, it is necessary to distinguish between
independence and autonomy: an agency may be independent, in the sense that the
judgements it makes formally on the basis of recommendations of its evaluation teams
are independent judgements, and are not influenced by the views of stakeholders. But
it can rarely operate autonomously from those to whom it provides a service - these
include providers of higher education (institutions), potential and current students,
government and employers. All these are the agency’s raison d’être and it provides a
service to them.

In addition, many responses showed that the words “independence” and “autonomy”
are used interchangeably, giving rise to a problem of vocabulary (see the parallel report
on the ENQA seminar “Language of Quality Assurance”, Warwick, June 2006 for
further detail).

The responses also show that it is necessary to distinguish between the question of
the legitimacy of an agency and the question of the acceptability of its results by others
(universities, ministries etc).

3.2 PEER REVIEW
Whatever the process of QA used (audit, institutional or programme evaluation,
accreditation…), peer review of some sort exists at the heart of every evaluation. It is
an attempt to allow the evaluation to operate in the most objective and yet acceptable
way possible.

The notion of peer review is understood differently by different agencies each of
whom has its own idea of what the term means. In certain cases, the peers can only be
drawn from a pool of university professors, in others from the entire pool of personnel
relevant to the evaluation in question. The participation of students in evaluation
procedures raises more questions about the legitimacy of those who participate in the
judgement-making and advisory processes.

In the end, the way in which evaluation procedures apply peer review varies between
agencies and depends on their concept of what is or is not acceptable. For example, in
some cases, peers carry out the review but an agency officer writes or edits the final
report. In others, it is the responsibility of the peer reviewers to write the report.

The matter of objectivity is also crucial. Peer evaluation has many features in
common with academic judgement, and it is for this reason that it cannot be rendered
completely objective by making it subject to a set of rules. It is also possible that
one panel of peers might reach a different conclusion to another panel on the same
evaluation. This can lead to disputes regarding the outcomes of evaluations, or the use
of appeal procedures.

3.3 TRANSPARENCY
Transparency was cited by some agencies as something that helped them to reflect on
their professionalism. The more an agency is transparent, the more it feels professional.

Interestingly the notion of transparency is not generally demonstrated through
the discussion of principles, but more often through a technical description of the
methods and procedures used. Transparency is the notion that most easily lends itself
technical discourse.

This notion was also used by the agencies to demonstrate legitimacy. However,
is transparency of function enough in itself to assure legitimacy in the eyes of
stakeholders? The experts were of the opinion that transparency was not necessarily a
positive notion. It is possible for the notion of transparency to be abused since claims can be made that procedures are straightforward and openly available for scrutiny, but are often then carried out subjectively.

Some responses highlighted a lack of criteria to address this value. How does one judge the transparency of an agency, of an evaluation method, or of the result of an evaluation without the necessary criteria? On the other hand, does a lack of transparency necessarily mean that the process or the judgement is unreliable?

Can one assume that there is a lack of criteria because agencies do not make the values that underpin transparency explicit or stable? If so, such a notion may risk losing its sense and place in QA in HE if there are no explicit and agreed criteria to demonstrate its importance.

3.4 RESULTS OF EVALUATIONS
This value was not discussed in detail in the responses. However, in some, a political dimension to results emerged.

Agencies gain some of their legitimacy through their mission to carry out a certain task – be it to make accreditation decisions, carry out audits, make public the results of an evaluation at subject or institutional level, safeguard standards and so on. It is difficult for them to question this task or mission. It may also underline the fact that agencies usually act within a framework designed by others (i.e. Governments, rector’s conference etc.).

3.5 CONCLUSIONS FROM THE OUTCOMES OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE
To conclude this section of the report, the four notions chosen for the questionnaire led to responses which highlighted the authority/legitimacy of agency practices. Interestingly none of the responses suggested that the wrong notions had been chosen or that the agency concerned did not believe one of the notions to be important. Can we therefore deduce that the legitimacy of the work of agencies is focussed on these four notions and the values that underpin them?

4. Legitimacy: a central matter
The QCS I study showed that the systematic organisation of quality assurance mechanisms is the result of interaction between partners (agencies, higher education providers, ministers etc). It suggested that there is no single definition or concept of quality. Rather the enhancement of quality in HE is the result of interaction between stakeholders.

The QCS II study, for its part, turned the thoughts towards the acceptability of the results of evaluations; that is, towards the conditions that must be fulfilled before the results of evaluations – be they recommendations, assessment or accreditation decisions – are recognised as well-founded and legitimate. This is an important question because evaluation results impact on the decision-making processes in individual higher education providers and also on the decisions made by other stakeholders.

In their responses to the questionnaire, the agencies tried to show the validity of their work by mentioning the mandate given to them, and their endeavours to ensure that the judgements that they published were governed by justice and equity. They immediately focused on virtue – to do well what has to be done – and sought to
demonstrate that they were reliable and credible by putting forward a definition of professionalism based on the notions of transparency, independence and utility.

It is possible that this tendency towards justification was caused in part by the way in which the questionnaire was designed, but the experts did not believe that to be the case. Rather they saw it as a sign that the agencies lacked a certain amount of self-confidence.

It may also be due to the fact that agencies are not used to questioning their own activities. They do not tend to challenge the frameworks that form the basis of their raison d’etre and to question the political decisions that impact on their work. They resolutely see themselves as operators of a set of procedures and defend themselves against encroaching on the territory of those that they see as political decision makers or the academic world.

The experts, a little provocatively (which was the nature of the relationship between them and the project steering group) wish to question the agencies on that essential area of their work: the results of evaluations. They invite them to consider more closely the nature of the judgements that they make and the notions of objectivity and transparency, not just the political dimension of quality assurance.

The pilot QCS II project calls on agencies to consider more carefully the most fundamental questions.

5. Respect for the process is not enough
Beyond the confines of QCS II, the matter of legitimacy is currently a topical one. It is of central importance for agencies.3

Just as agencies do their utmost to demonstrate their transparency and independence; it would seem that respect for such values is not enough to underpin legitimacy. The outcomes of evaluations, which play an important part in higher education, claim to be the result of technical procedures and thus, entirely objective. But is this really the case?

A look at the ESG can help to clarify things: they refer to the conditions necessary for evaluation results to be legitimate. Part one of the ESG addresses the legitimacy of the objectives of evaluation and parts 2 and 3 address the legitimacy of the processes and the results. Despite that, does strict adherence to the ESG lead automatically to legitimate and acceptable decisions? Those who run evaluations know from experience that one can only evaluate something if one knows its purpose. Will the procedures associated with an evaluation always come up with the right result? Can something really be evaluated if its own objectives are not taken into account in the process? So, what really leads to legitimacy and acceptability of results?

6. The political nature of evaluation
Agencies cannot claim to work outside the political arena. Their results are used by decision-makers and higher education providers to steer higher education systems and to appraise their quality. If the agencies do not take this into account, don’t they risk, behind the façade of independence, being exploited? Doesn’t this position make dialogue with HE providers more difficult?

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3 Cf. the Council of Europe seminar in Strasbourg on 18th and 19th September 2006 which focussed on “quality assurance and its legitimacy in higher education: the role of universities and national authorities.”
7. To take things further

The limitations of a procedural approach, and the recognition of these limitations, oblige the agencies to reflect on the matter. The following scenarios could usefully form the basis of some systematic reflection on their part in order to reinforce the quality of the link that binds the agencies to their partners:

- The agencies are part of many actors in the higher education system. They are independent but not, however, necessarily autonomous. So where does the balance lie? What is the necessary distance – needed for evaluations – between agencies and higher education providers (which is the translation of the notion of independence in external evaluation) and the proximity which will allow for an understanding of the higher education system within which individual institutions are operating?
- Peer evaluation is supposed to guarantee the legitimacy of an evaluation since it means that the system is being evaluated by those who understand it. This notion is generally shared by policy makers and by the academic world. It is not, however, exempt from criticism, because it is not enough to guarantee the acceptability of results. So, how can we consider the link between those who are being evaluated and the agencies that carry the evaluations out? How can we discuss the link between agencies’ activities and their purpose? The question of legitimacy is a collective one – shouldn’t the debate therefore involve all parties with an interest in higher education?
- It is difficult for agencies to think about evaluation without considering the aims of higher education. Aren’t they right, along with other parties in the higher education system, to ask themselves what sort of results that system really needs from evaluations?

Finally, it seems sensible to continue the questions opened up by this project to avoid the notions of independence, transparency and objectivity playing too exhaustive a role in the development of methodologies. Thus agencies may, in the spirit of openness, be able to fully play their part in higher education systems.

The project steering group wishes to thank the experts who provided them with so much help throughout the QCS II study:

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Dr Licinio Lima, University of Minho, Portugal
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Prof Dr Alexander Shurbanov, University of Sofia, Bulgaria
Abstract

QAA completed a full round of institutional audits in England between spring 2003 and summer 2006. The audit process was evaluated by a review group established by the higher education funding council and the representative bodies of the higher education sector. The group assessed the costs and benefits of institutional audit and made recommendations for future developments. This paper uses evidence from the review, together with QAA’s own evaluation of audit, to examine the impact of external review on institutions and consider the strategies adopted for managing the process. Some institutions have designed internal systems that help to minimise the preparations needed for QAA audit. Others have done more than is required in an attempt to minimise risk – an approach referred to in the review report as ‘gold-plating.’ The reasons for over preparation are examined and possible future developments of quality assurance are considered.

‘The assurance of quality in higher education is complex. Quality is a subtle and precious commodity, and is not the same for all disciplines, all institutions or all students. While external review can help to measure and protect standards, and to encourage quality enhancement, it cannot provide an absolute measure of quality. Nor can it deliver improvements in quality – only institutions and their staff can do that.’ (JM Consulting, 2005)

The approach to quality assurance in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, the Quality Assurance Agency has a remit ‘… to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education’. This is achieved by reviewing academic standards and quality, and providing nationally agreed reference points that help to define clear and explicit standards. (QAA, 2006). The reference points include the frameworks for higher education qualifications, subject benchmark statements, the QAA Code of practice and programme specifications.

The principal method for fulfilling these objectives is the periodic review of institutional management of quality and standards—referred to as institutional audit (IA) in England and Northern Ireland, institutional review (IR) in Wales and enhancement led institutional review (ELIR) in Scotland, where there is sharper focus on enhancement activity.
The review of institutions is intended to address a number of related objectives. It has a focus on the quality of students’ learning experience and promotes high quality and standards in teaching and learning, it provides students, employers and others with reliable and consistent information about the management of quality and standards by higher education institutions, it ensures that all higher education programmes meet minimum standards and that students can be assured that wherever they study for a UK higher education award they will receive a qualification that is well regarded by employers and fulfils all basic requirements, it provides a means of securing accountability for the use of public funds and it protects and enhances the reputation of UK higher education, both within the UK and internationally.

In particular, QAA promotes its audit and review methods as a means for encouraging quality enhancement. It offers benefits by helping institutions to test and benchmark their own processes. It supports staff development and provides a focus for academic dialogue around the improvement of the student experience. It can also be seen as a process for enhancement based on the stages of the institutional review method. The review process begins with an institutional evaluation of current practices resulting in a self-evaluation document. This analysis is tested by the review team by reference to the Academic Infrastructure and knowledge of experience across the HE sector. The team’s report includes recommendations for enhancement. These are generally followed-up by an action plan and a report back to QAA on progress. The implementation of improvements is evaluated at the next audit engagement.

Costs and benefits of institutional audit

Following the decision by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), in 2001, to bring to an end the review of subjects within English Higher Education Institutions, there was an agreement between the DfES, the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE), QAA and the representative bodies (Universities UK and the Standing Conference of Principals) about the revised arrangements for the assurance of the quality and standards of higher education in England. These arrangements became known as the ‘Quality Assurance Framework’ and included the institutional audit method, the Teaching Quality Information website (TQI), and the National Student Survey (NSS). QAA’s Academic Infrastructure was also acknowledged as underpinning the framework. It was agreed that these new arrangements would be reviewed after the first two full years of operation.

Consequently HEFCE established a representative group in 2004 to carry out the review. The ‘Quality Assurance Framework Review Group’ (QAFRG), chaired by Dame Sandra Burslem, then the Vice Chancellor of Manchester Metropolitan University, and with members drawn from all the main interest groups in higher education. In order to carry out its business QAFRG commissioned a programme of research from JM Consulting into the costs and benefits of external quality assurance of teaching and learning in higher education institutions in England (HEFCE 2005)

The research identified that the total costs of external quality assurance review for English higher education institutions was approximately £40 million per year. This included both the costs of QAA audit and review activities and the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs). The costs were based on the
work done by institutions in preparation for external review including the production of documentation, the briefing of staff and preparation for meetings.

However, the report also recognised that a proportion of these costs may reflect the requirements for quality assurance more generally, rather than costs that can be directly attributed to external review activity. In some cases, it is not easy to distinguish between the demands of internal quality review and the needs of the QAA and other agencies, and indeed, some institutions have adopted a strategy of investing in their own quality infrastructure to avoid the need for additional costs associated with audit or review.

In addition to the quantifiable costs to institutions there were also opportunity costs in relation to the diversion of staff time and energy from other core activities in teaching and research. A number of institutions identified the importance of investing more time and effort into the external assessment of research, rather than institutional audit, because the outcomes of the research assessment exercise, organised by the higher education funding council, were more directly related to institutional income.

The outcomes of institutional audits and reviews are published in reports which are made available on the QAA website and distributed widely across the HE sector. Audit teams make judgements at the end of the process on the confidence that can be placed in HEI’s management of its responsibilities for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. In the last round of audits the greater majority of institutions received a judgement of ‘Broad Confidence’. A small number, however, received judgements of ‘Limited Confidence’ a consequence that was judged detrimental to institutional reputation. In some cases these judgements have led to significant developments and structural changes within higher education institutions.

Self-inflicted costs: gold plating

Based on the evidence of the research the QAFRG made recommendations for next stage of institutional audit which significantly reduced the costs to institutions. These changes have now been implemented as part of a revised Institutional Audit method (see below). However, the research also found that institutions did not always manage the process of external review strategically. Many did more than was strictly required in an attempt to minimise the reputational risk from the review processes and some engaged in over-elaborate preparations – an approach referred to in the report as ‘gold-plating’. Institutions took this approach for a variety of reasons:

‘One aspect [is a] decision to ‘put a bit more in’ in the knowledge that this is either necessary because systems are weak, or to treat an impending audit as a developmental exercise; [or] to seek to be recognised as excellent, rather than just compliant, and hence incur additional costs; [or] because the ‘costs of anything going wrong were simply huge’. This was notably the view of institutions with either a very high reputation to protect, or, conversely those which felt they were still trying to prove their credentials as a higher education institution.’ (JM Consulting, 2005)

All the above factors are ways in which an institution might seek to maximise the returns from quality assurance activity. There were however, other occasions where the costs were not associated with obvious benefits. The additional preparation
reflected either a lack of coordination and direction, inadequate administrative support arrangements, or poor understanding of the requirements of QAA. The report concluded that ‘..our assessment is that the combination of these factors added significantly to the costs of audit for some departments and some institutions. Arguably, this is wasteful, and an inefficient use of public funds. It is increasing the burden of review and reducing the cost effectiveness of institutional audit (JM Consulting, 2005)

These concerns led the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group to recommend that QAA should assess institutional strategies for preparing for institutional audit and ‘…that where the audit team believes an institution has made more effort than necessary preparing for the institutional audit, and that this has not been consciously undertaken in order to add value to the process for the institution, this might helpfully be reflected in the report and advice and guidance given to the higher education institution’. (HEFCE, 2006)

Behind this recommendation was a concern that some institutions had adopted instrumental strategies for the management of their engagements with the QAA. Their primary objective was to ‘control’ the process to ensure that the right outcomes from the audit event were achieved rather than focus on the broader underlying objective of encouraging continuous improvement in the quality of the students’ learning opportunities. Quality managers had become very familiar with the QAA audit method and managed the collection of evidence to meet the likely interests of audit teams. The strategies adopted included the preparation of customised documentation, the collection of evidence in case it might be needed and the briefing of staff and students for their engagements with the audit team. Additionally, some institutions ran ‘mock audits’ before the event to ensure that those involved were rehearsed for their role in the process. The report noted that the preoccupation with the preparation for the audit event often placed additional pressures on staff and raised unnecessary anxiety. It added a significant and unnecessary cost for institutions.

Related to these instrumental approaches to managing audit is a tendency for institutions to identify QAA’s activities as a risk to institutional reputation, and to take steps to limit the dangers involved. By adopting a ‘risk averse’ approach, institutions become overly focused on the audit event and made every effort to ensure a satisfactory engagement with the audit team. This runs counter to the primary objectives of encouraging mature self reflection and a culture of quality enhancement.

However, by way of contrast JM consulting identified a number of institutions that had adopted a more positive and constructive approach to their relations with QAA. These were institutions that demonstrated good practice in having:

‘…a mature Academic Infrastructure; adopting a strategic and confident approach to Institutional Audit; avoiding creating new documentation where they already had effective internal processes; and being open and developmental in their dealings with the QAA. These institutions generally had significantly lower costs of audit, and a better cost/benefit ratio, and we believe others could learn from this experience.’ (JM Consulting, 2005)
Rationalising regulation

The report highlighted that the issue of ‘burden’ for many institutions was not so much the methodology adopted by QAA, but the overlap and repetition of the wide range of different agencies and organisations that reviewed and accredited university departments and courses. This is in line with current government thinking within the UK where there is a desire to reduce the costs of unnecessary bureaucracy by rationalising regulation and encouraging closer working relations between inspectorates. A ministerial committee has been established to oversee the policy and to enforce its implementation. The Department for Education and Skills has the responsibility of assessing the costs and benefits of inspection and review activity in higher education

This has been progressed through the establishment of the Higher Education Regulation Review Group (HERRG), a ‘gatekeeper’ body charged with assessing new initiatives to prevent unnecessary burdens on Universities and to monitor and encourage continuous improvement in review activity. HERRG has drawn-up a concordat for the major players in higher education regulation and review which states the main principles and purpose of review activity and encourages closer cooperation between the various bodies involved. QAA is a signatory to the HERRG concordat and has developed its methods and approaches to address the principles of better regulation without compromising its objectives or purpose. The drive for reducing burden has, however, raised important issues about the effectiveness of review methods and the need for accountability.

The revised institutional audit method

In revising the methodology for Institutional Audit, QAA has attempted to achieve a balance between the purpose and objectives of the process and the need to minimise the regulatory burden placed on institutions. The new method focuses on the responsibilities of institutions to assure the quality and standards of their awards and to secure the learning opportunities for students. The approach seeks to build on existing sources of information from institutions and to assess the effectiveness of institutions internal quality assurance structures and mechanisms. Consultation with higher education institutions identified a strong desire for consistency in process and a close alignment between the requirements of QAA and internal procedures for managing quality assurance within institutions.

The principal difference with the new method is the replacement of discipline audit trails (DATs) with an audit trail methodology which is less burdensome and focused specifically on the needs of the audit process. Preparation for DATs had required significant contributions from subject staff and the audit process had included a review of primary evidence of student performance. In the revised method there is a recognition that institutions have the responsibility of assuring themselves of subject standards and of the quality of the students’ learning experience. This is achieved both through internal procedures for monitoring and review and through the contributions of external examiners. Audit teams look at how well institutions discharge these functions, including how they make use of advice received from external examiners. The expectation is that the evidence of these activities is readily available from established institutional procedures and should not require the production of additional documentation.
The other significant change in the new method is a shift in the balance towards enhancement. The Quality Framework Review Group recognised the fact that previous cycles of audit had established that there were no systemic weaknesses in the management of quality and standards in higher education. For the audit method to retain value it needed to find ways of engaging institutions in critical self review and continuous quality improvement. The focus on enhancement provides a means by which external review can be more directly linked to institutional strategies for enhancing the learning experience of students. In the revised institutional audit method, quality enhancement is defined as ‘...the process of taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities.’ (QAA, 2006). This is more than just initiatives or projects which provide examples of good practice. It is about a commitment to reflect on experience and invest in improvement. In this context institutional audit can be seen not just as a way of confirming that institutions are meeting national expectations in terms of quality and standards, but rather as a means for external benchmarking of institutional practices and support for the strategic development of quality.

Future directions: lighter touch

In the discussions about the development of the Quality Assurance Framework there was frequent reference to the need for a ‘light touch’ version of audit to provide public assurance of academic standards but without the imposition of excessive burdens on institutions. Lightness of touch does not necessarily imply either superficial review or a limited scope to audit. It is more about the removal of ‘unnecessary’ activity and external confidence in the practices and procedures that institutions employ to meet their own expectations. Where it can be demonstrated that internal procedures work effectively there is less need for external checking. The JM Consulting report concluded that ‘...the burden of review should be the minimum that is required to deliver specific assurances and benefits that are its stated purpose.’ Three principles were proposed: that institutions provision should normally only have to experience external review by one agency, that the demands of review should be related to the level of risk and the volume and cost of the provision concerned and that agencies should use existing information wherever possible rather than requiring the recreation of data to particular formats.

This sets a challenging agenda for reviewing agencies. The objective should be an appropriate balance between expectations of institutions to manage their own affairs and the public requirement for objective information about the quality and standards of higher education awards.

Conclusion

Overall, the research has identified significant progress in the reduction of unnecessary requirements on institutions. The changes that followed the recommendations of the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group have resulted in a more streamlined process for audit with a clearer focus on enhancement activities. However, many of the perceived ‘burdens’ remain in the requirements of other external organisations and the internal demands generated by a desire to minimise
risk. There is still more work to be done. Looking to the future there are likely to be other requirements arising from student expectations and from quality assurance developments in Europe and Internationally. The key to reducing the burden of these activities is linked to the development of internal systems and procedures within institutions that give confidence in quality and standards rather than trying to manage the processes of review. The way to reduce ‘gold plating’ is to develop robust procedures that are embedded within institutional practice and which provide evidence of sound academic standards.

References:

JM Consulting, *The costs and benefits of external review of quality assurance in higher education*
A report to the Quality Assurance Framework Review Group, 2005


Abstract:

Ranking is a well-known technique to indicate quality outcomes from quality assurance of institutions and used in higher education worldwide. However, it has been criticized for the weaknesses. In this paper, we present a new ranking and rating approach in higher education. The main objective of this study is to construct ranking and rating approach which provide powerful results. Through documentary research method, it was found that the quality report can be effectively described partial and holistic quality through 4 main contents as: (1) ranking and rating in three stakeholders’ perspectives: institutions, students/parents, and employers; (2) ranking and rating in two dimensions of quality: current and potential quality; (3) ranking and rating in each factor of quality and (4) aggregated quality hierarchical ranking and rating from three levels: program, faculty and university.

Keywords

Ranking and Rating, Stakeholders’ perspectives, Multi-dimensional Quality, Higher Education, Hierarchical Linear Model (HLM), Threshold

Introduction

Everyone around the globe increasingly recognize importance of quality. Ranking is the popular method for indicating the quality of university. Although it tends to be increasingly used nowadays, ranking method is often heavily criticized (Dill and Soo, 2005).

To improve effectiveness of the ranking system, the researchers has merged a number of several techniques and perspectives to come up with a new quality ranking and rating approach that can describe quality in a more efficient and effective way.
Objectives

The objectives were:
1. To investigate ranking approach used in higher education
2. To synthesize a new approach of ranking.

Conceptual Framework

In development of ranking and rating approach, the researchers have studied documentations related to the field of educational quality ranking and rating to analyze concepts and pick up current issues of the current ranking and rating systems. Trend, strengths and weakness as well as the areas where improvements may still be possible have also been analyzed. A conceptual framework of new approach development shown in figure 1.
Methods

The methods of this study is divided into 2 phases as follows:

Phase 1: Analysis of the current ranking approaches by documentary research. The researchers have reviewed related literatures and documentations, well-known ranking, experts' opinions and researches on ranking.

Phase 2: Development of a new ranking approach which is “The multi-dimensional quality in stakeholders’ perspectives with hierarchical ranking and rating”.

Finding

Result of the documentation research disclosed several issues within the current ranking system. Out of all those issues, format, objectives, indicators, methods, and the reporting were among the key problems to be discussed in more details as follows:

1. Ranking Format

Most of the ranking systems seem to compare universities with the sole use of ranking only. One of the problems found is that universities with average quality in the middle level having similar quality, the score difference of just 0.5 or 1 could make big impact to the ranked order, as evidenced in the the research work of Feng (2005) who studied the “Academic Ranking of World Universities” (SJTU) which is in conformance to the research of Wongwanich and Wiratchai (1999) who studied “Asia’a Best Universities” (Asiaweeks’ Magazine). Moreover, Wongwanich and Wiratchai (1999) also found out that there are significant changes in ranking of the Asia’s Best Universities for 1997, 1998, and 1999 despite of the fact that quality of most universities was unchanged. This situation may be explained by the difference in number of total universities in the ranking system of each year.

Moreover, Most of the well-know ranking systems ranks quality in general or overall view of universities and ignored to rank in sub-level such as faculty, department or program. From a closer look at fields of study offered by each university, it has been found out that those fields of study are much different from university to university. Where indicators or priorities used in the ranking should be different for different fields of study, direct comparison of performance of these universities should not represent a fair comparison between them. Wongwanich and Wiratchai (1999) stated that where characteristics of the offered fields of study are much different in nature, the indicators or priorities used for each field of study should be different from each other. In addition, only ranking itself in term of general view among universities would not provide information which is useful enough for developing the universities because the ranked universities may have no detail about their specific strengths and weaknesses in specific departments or fields of study. Furthermore, in “University Ranking” paper (Encyclopedia.laborlawtalk.com, 2005) pointed out that general or overall view of university’s quality may not be adequate for the students to choose the right place for them hence It is necessary to consider deeper at quality of faculty, department and program level.

In order to improve reliability of the ranking system for the case of similar quality, the ranking method should be used in conjunction with rating method as more information will be used for better judgments. This will help solve problem for the
case of many universities with similar quality level as well as the case of different number of universities for the ranking of each year, and to provide more accurate and useful information for quality development. Ranking should be ranked in quality faculty, department or program level, because it could be compared between each similar field of study while university ranking were blamed unfairly to compare them all once cause of universities’ diversity.

2. Objectives of Ranking

Some ranking systems are done without clearly specified objectives and/or target groups and they could cause misleading and dispute among the stakeholders using such results. Because different people will normally have different expectation on the quality. Therefore, without clear objectives, the indicators used for ranking may not be suitable or complete (Liu and Cheng, 2005).

Objectives of ranking depend heavily on users who are stakeholders in higher education. Such main stakeholders can be categorized into 3 main groups by their objectives of using such ranking information as shown in table 1.

Table 1 Stakeholders categorized by objectives of using ranking information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Objectives of using ranking information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher education institutions</td>
<td>Make decision on university improvement: policy establishment, resource allocation, funding management, social response, etc. (Chaney and et., 2004; Altbach, 2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students/parents</td>
<td>Choose university to apply for (Vaughn 2002; Chaney and et., 2004; Altbach, 2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>Choose university to recruit the graduates (Chaney and et., 2004)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Indicators

Indicators used in most well-known university ranking systems represent indicators in 8 factors (as shown in table 2) consisting of reputation, research, rewards, finance, programs, student selectivity, resources, and student output (Asiaweek Magazine, 2005; Shanghai Jiao Tong University, 2005; US News & World Report, 2005; Australian Education Network, 2004; Blackwell Publishing, 2004; Maclean’s Magazine, 2004; Lancaster University, 2003; Higher Education & Research Opportunities in the United Kingdom, 2001). These indicators have always been defined by experts to show the “Current quality”.

The ranking systems using these indicators usually show weak points of quality representation as multi-dimensional facets of quality are not captured in the assessment (Brooks, 2005). In the dynamic world of globalization, data reflecting current quality of the higher education institutes is far from being sufficient because most universities and colleges will have to change or adapt to fulfill requirements in the changing situation. To be able to reflect such ability to change, the quality definition should also involve capability in learning and development to create the “Intellectual Capital” with continuous quality improvement for competitiveness (Nakhornthap, 2000) which called the “Potential quality”.

Besides, multiple stakeholders’ requirements are still not fulfilled with the current ranking systems using above set of indicators.
Therefore, in order to make the quality ranking complete and effective, both the current and potential quality from the stakeholders’ perspectives should be properly evaluated within the ranking system.

Table 2 Quality indicators in well-known university ranking systems.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University ranking/rating</th>
<th>World</th>
<th>U.S.A.</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>Australia Education Network**</th>
<th>Asia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SJTU</td>
<td>U.S. News</td>
<td>RAE*</td>
<td>Maclean</td>
<td>The views of Deans and CEOs</td>
<td>Academic reputation (20%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Peer assessment (25%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Reputation (20%)</td>
<td>The views of Deans and CEOs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>- Highly cited researchers in 21 broad subject categories (20%)</td>
<td>- Approach to work - Knowledge and skill - Flexibility - Team work - Quality of work</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Research (20%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards</td>
<td>Nobel laureates in physics, chemistry, medicine and economics (20%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Financial resources (10%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Finances (12%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Financial resources (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-Graduate programs</td>
<td>Undergrad programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student selectivity</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Student selectivity (15%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Student body (21% to 22% of final score)</td>
<td>Undergrad intake</td>
<td>Student selectivity (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Academic performance per faculty (20%)</td>
<td>Faculty resources (20%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>- Classes (17% to 18%) - Faculty (17%) - Library (12%)</td>
<td>-Resources - The international standing of staff</td>
<td>Faculty resources (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student output</td>
<td>- Graduation rate performance (5%)</td>
<td>Graduation and retention rate (20%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The RAE assesses the quality of research in universities and colleges.

** Weight, not appear

4. Method

In general, the issue of methodology is missing in the quality ranking. (Altbach, 2006). Dill and Soo (2005) proposed that the ranking should be done with
the methodology that allows optimum use of the data by allowing the data to be sorted in accordance with the consumer requirements.

In order to get the data sorted in rank as per requirements of the consumer groups, Multi-level analysis with Hierarchical Linear Model (HLM) program is used in data analysis for hierarchical ranking and rating. The results from Multi-level analysis can explain effect of the faculty and the university to the program quality. Ranking and rating in hierarchical effect of quality are the very important information for quality improvement.

For the current method of rating, there is still an issue that there is still no methodology to support the consensus used for grouping different levels of universities/programs (Brooks, 2005). For a clear and transparent rating, the cluster analysis is appropriate to use in data analysis for rating since it can make the result of grouping by statistical analysis become more reliable and acceptable.

For quality improvement, a minimum threshold level is set for the ranking and rating of quality. This level will define minimum standards of the higher education system and will make each institution become more aware of the quality issue. They will at least have to be qualified by the minimum standards first before being compared with others. (Smith and et al., 1999)

5. Report

One problem of the current ranking report is that its level of information is normally insufficient due to the emphasis given solely on the result. (Vaughn, 2002).

Brooks (2005) and Vaughn (2002) proposed, ranking should be provided with information of more efficient use resulting in a more meaningful quality development and decision making on various issues.

Ranking reporting depends on the design of data collection, data calculation, and data interpretation (Brooks, 2005). From the method of new approach, can report information in multi-dimensional quality approach with partial and holistic view of quality for the complete and meaningful information.

“The multi-dimensional quality in stakeholders’ perspectives with hierarchical ranking and rating”.

Major critical issues of the current ranking system can be solved by the approach which is “The multi-dimensional quality in stakeholders’ perspectives with hierarchical ranking and rating” that provides sufficient information to the users. Quality ranking and rating is reported in multi-dimensional quality with requirements of the stakeholders’ perspectives and fulfilling in hierarchical ranking rating, described the approach in figure 2.

Concept of ranking and rating approach. Format, is the use of ranking along with rating for a more accurate and reliable information compared with using these two approaches separately, we found that ranking of program level provided more accurate and usable information than ranking in university level. Indicators, for ranking and rating, is to complete the content of quality fulfill the stakeholders’ requirements. Such indicators consist of two dimensions of quality in three stakeholders’ perspectives. Method, is the way to get more information for quality improvement. Multi-level analysis is used in hierarchical ranking and rating to explain effect of program quality from faculty and university, the cluster analysis is used in data analysis for rating since it can make the result of grouping by statistical analysis
Figure 2 The multi-dimensional quality in stakeholders’ perspectives with hierarchical ranking and rating approach.
and threshold level is used for setting minimum standards for ranking and rating. Reporting, is the way to make quality information available for efficient decision making. Partial and holistic quality results in multi-dimensional quality and the stakeholders’ perspectives approach.

The process of ranking and rating, the first step is to rank and rate quality in each perspective and report ranking and rating in three stakeholders’ perspectives (institutions, students/parents, and employers). The second step, the combination of quality score from each dimension be ranked and rated then reported in two dimensions of quality (current and potential). The third step, the combination of quality score from each factor of quality such as research will be ranked and rated for each quality factor. The result can report ranking and rating in factors of quality. The last is hierarchical ranking and rating, the combination of holistic quality compared with the threshold (minimum standards). If and only if the program is qualified with the minimum standard, such program can then be taken into ranking and rating. Those programs that fail to fulfill requirements of the minimum standards will not be considered for ranking and rating but it will be reported that such program of quality is still below the threshold level. Then multi-level analysis will be done and 3-level HLM model is calculated to analyze the effect sent to the program quality. Then quality in each of quality level will be ranked and rated mutually then the quality can be reported in three levels: university, faculty and program.

**Conclusion and Discussion**

The multi-dimensional quality in stakeholders’ perspectives with hierarchical ranking and rating approach can efficiently describe quality in higher education. The result attained from this approach can show partial, holistic quality and reported many facets and perspectives of quality allowing the users to get complete information for making meaningful judgment.

Report from the stakeholders’ perspectives will allow the stakeholder to make decision about the program efficiently.

Report from dimension of quality enables the administrators and policymakers to make decision for university improvement. Current quality represents the present quality program, while potential quality represents learning and development capability to improve quality for competitiveness.

Report from factors of quality provides strengths and weaknesses information necessary for the program analysis.

Report from multi-levels of quality provides more information to describe effect to program quality from faculty and university. These reports allow the users to get complete information for meaningful program improvement.

Report in ranking along with rating is more accurate than uses either only ranking or rating. Furthermore, pre-screening with the threshold level prior to the further process in ranking and rating helps improve quality level of the higher education system because each institution will become more aware of quality issue.

**Next Step**

Next step, the researchers will develop ranking and rating model following this approach. Then engineering program in Thailand will be used as demonstrating cases by this model.
Reference


Introduction

Diversity in higher education refers to the existence of distinct forms of postsecondary education, of institutions or groups of institutions within a state that have different missions, educate for different purposes, and have different styles of instruction, are funded differently and relate differently to the state. (V. Meek et al 2000:3).

Broadly speaking the methodologies used to achieve diversity in national higher education systems fall in one or more of the following approaches: government steering through funding and planning, government regulation through institutional restructuring and re-designation, and market forces through competition. What has been the role of quality assurance regimes and their implementing agencies in the quest for differentiation? Has QA actually facilitated differentiation within higher education systems, or, on the contrary, contributed to further homogenisation?

In this paper we take the experience of the national QA body in SA, the Higher Education Quality Committee of South Africa of the CHE, in order to explore the role of QA in bringing about the goal of institutional differentiation pursued in and through higher education policy after 1994. In the paper we first explain the political and policy context of higher education reform in South Africa. Secondly, we analyse the notion of differentiation/homogenisation as possible unforeseen consequences of the implementation of a quality assurance regime. Thirdly, we explore how issues of differentiation have been factored into the training of auditors by the HEQC. Finally, we reflect on the position of QA agencies in relation to the different outcomes of the processes of differentiation in national higher education systems and lay out some of the conceptual and methodological issues which need to be engaged with in relation to quality of provision.

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1 Dr Lange is ED of the Higher Education Quality Committee, Council on Higher Education, South Africa and Dr Singh is the Interim CEO of the Council on Higher Education, South Africa.
1. Diversity and differentiation in South African higher education.

In 1990 the South African higher education system consisted of 36 higher education institutions (HEIs) which were administered by eight different government departments in the Republic of South Africa and the apartheid ‘bantustans’. The system was divided along racial and ethnic lines as well as in terms of medium of instruction. On the eve of the first democratic election, the South African higher education system was made up of four English-medium universities originally reserved for white students; six Afrikaans medium universities originally reserved for white students; seven technikons (polytechnic type HEIs) reserved for white students; six universities and five technikons located in the ‘bantustans’ and the self-governing territories and reserved for Africans; two urban universities and two technikons reserved for Coloured and Indian students; two urban universities reserved for African students and two distance providers, one university and one technikon. (Cloete 2002:58-80)

These institutions had different missions, educated for different purposes, had different styles and media of instruction, were funded differently, and related differently to the state. Overall, the purpose of this higher education system was to support a form of class reproduction which guaranteed the continuation of a political system based on racial segregation and exploitation.

The higher education system was binary, with universities being responsible for academic and professional education, and technikons focusing on vocational and technical education. Accompanying this division was a hierarchy of knowledge types in relation to which academic and professional knowledge was regarded as being on a higher level than technical and vocational knowledge. This hierarchy of knowledge was manifested in the institutions themselves.

In 1990, the higher education system catered for approximately 400 000 students (headcount enrolments) who enjoyed almost no mobility across institutions. From the point of view of participation rates by race group, the system was sharply unequal with 9 percent Africans, 13 percent Coloureds, 40 percent Indians and 70 percent white students enrolled in the HEIs. This is in a country where the African population is more than 90% of the total. By 1994, in the context of accelerated political change, headcount enrolments had grown to 467 000 students and the participation per race group had improved, with white students now constituting 47 percent of the enrolments, Africans 40 percent, Indians 7 percent and Coloureds 6 percent. (CHE 2004: 59-90)
This expansion of the HE system, which did not last into the second half of the 1990s, included a movement of students from historically black institutions to historically white institutions, which resulted in a substantial alteration of their demographic profile.

In sum, until 1990 the South African higher education system was highly differentiated and very low in diversity (understood as socio-cultural and racial variety) within the different sectors set up by the then government. The racial profile started to change with the expansion of enrolments in 1994. The legacy of apartheid higher education was undeniably one of differentiation but of a perverse sort - in addition to the binary divide, the differentiation was along lines of race, ethnicity and language accompanied by differences of quality as well as in social and professional esteem. The policies of the new democratic government had to contend with the ideologically driven fragmentation of the HE system and steer towards a single more integrated system, reconstructed beyond racial lines, in order to facilitate equity of access to a quality education in every part of the new system. The new system did not abjure differentiation but sought to premise it differently in the task of constructing a racially integrated system that was more responsive to the needs of a new social order.

In this regard, a decade after the political transition to democracy, the interesting question to pose is whether the task of integration, the imperative of responsiveness, and the initiative to build quality across the entire system, has produced elements of system homogenization that is making the pursuit of necessary differentiation more difficult. The further question is whether some measure of homogenization was not necessary in the early phase of HE reconstruction but to also ask very sharply about how one moves beyond the first decade to a system that builds on the integration building of the last ten years and steers towards a socially useful and morally defendable differentiation in HE.

After 1994 all HEIs in South Africa had to educate towards the same purpose: to contribute to the transformation of a divided and unequal society into a democracy based on social justice. All institutions operate under a common funding formula and planning framework, and are subject to a common set of quality assurance requirements. None of them is racially exclusive, although the degree of inclusion varies. As for the binary system and the hierarchy of knowledge attached to it, the creation of a National Qualifications Framework, designed to allow for portability of qualifications across the system, went a long way towards upsetting the sharp differences between academic and professional knowledge and vocational and
technical knowledge. This was also aided by state authorization in 1996 for technikons to offer degree programmes, including doctorates.

The ideal of a single coordinated higher education system proposed in the national policy framework contained the embryo of a new form of differentiation: that of mission. However, government demands for HEIs to be responsive to the knowledge and skills needs of reconstruction, market opportunity, and leadership drive (especially in the case of historically black institutions) to transcend the constraints of the apartheid past, created the space for a process of homogenization which started first, with the development of similar missions and further manifested itself in academic drift on both sides of the binary divide. Post 1994 mission and identity construction in the HEI sector reflected an invocation of common purpose sociopolitical goals and aspirations (often repeating the discourse of policy documents) beyond the unacceptable differentiation of the past.

Ironically, it seems that, to some extent, homogenization was reinforced, indirectly, by the process of restructuring of the higher education system through mergers and incorporations led by the government. After the release of the National Plan on Higher Education in 2001 which indicated the need to create new institutional types in order to do away with the inefficiency and inequity of the HE system inherited from apartheid, government announced how it was going to reconfigure the institutional landscape.

In 2004, at the start of the implementation of the HEQC quality assurance system, the public HE system catered for approximately 650 000 students and was organized into eleven universities, five universities of technology (technikons) and six comprehensive institutions (CHE 2004: 52). Several of these institutions had been merged, some of them were the result of incorporations, and some of them had their missions reconfigured or had been redesignated.

The reconfigured system was the result of the merger and/or incorporation of historically black and historically white institutions, and of the creation of two new institutional types: comprehensive (universities) which are supposed to offer both technikon type and university type programmes, and universities of technology. The academic profile of these new institutional types has not been clearly defined, neither in the national policy nor by the institutions themselves, creating yet further opportunities for academic drift and homogenization.

The above outline refers to public higher education. However, since the early 1990s there was an expansion of private higher education provision in South Africa. The
majority of these providers are for-profit institutions which operate mostly at the undergraduate level and are focused on vocational and professional training. Currently, there are around 90 registered private providers in South Africa who cater for approximately 5 percent of the total higher education enrolments in the country.

2. Differentiation and the three steering instruments: The HEQC System

One of the effects of the differentiation of the apartheid higher education system was that quality of provision, resources and capabilities varied widely between institutions and between institutional sectors. After 1994, it soon became evident that while access had been expanded and the participation of black students in enrolments was much larger than before, equity in relation to success, distribution of enrolments across disciplinary fields, and levels of study was still skewed along racial lines. In order to address this problem, the state chose to use three steering instruments: funding, planning and quality, in order to move HE towards a more effective achievement of policy goals. The first two instruments are the responsibility of the Department of Education, and quality that of the Council on Higher Education’s (CHE) permanent committee on quality, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC).

The CHE was created by the Higher Education Act of 1997 and established in 1999. The Act indicated that the responsibilities of the CHE’s permanent quality committee were to audit HEIs, accredit their programmes, and promote quality. To these legislated functions, the HEQC Board added the development of quality related capacity.

The HEQC was officially launched with the release of its *Founding Document* and the appointment of its first Board in 2001. The years between 2001 and 2003 were dedicated to the development of the different components of a system of quality assurance able to respond to the national imperatives of producing a better, more accessible, more equitable and better differentiated higher education system.

In response to the need to build acceptable quality levels in all spheres of the HE system, the HEQC chose to have a common set of quality requirements for all the different sectors of higher education: universities, technikons and private providers. It prioritised teaching and learning in order to focus on an under-addressed issue in the

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2 Due to space constraints we will not discuss the role of funding and planning in the homogenization/differentiation process.

3 For a discussion of how the CHE and the HEQC sought to repurpose seemingly conservative instruments for progressive ends, see Lange 2006 and Singh 2006.
restructuring, and developed additional criteria for differentiated missions, e.g. research universities, distance education provision, work-based learning, etc. This made it possible to transcend special claims about quality depending on sectoral type or historical legacy, and put the emphasis on a new system to which all institutions were equally subject and which could serve the aspiration and right of all students to equitable access to good quality education, irrespective of which part of the higher education system they were in. (Singh 2006: 70)

The HEQC definition of quality as fitness of purpose, fitness for purpose, individual and social transformation, and value for money was given effect in the Framework for Institutional Audits and the Criteria for Institutional Audits, which were to be used in the implementation of the first cycle of quality assurance 2004-2006.

The HEQC developed an audit methodology that is peer driven and evidence based and which uses agreed upon criteria to inform both institutional self-assessments and their validation by external panels.  

The HEQC audit system contains elements which, depending on how they are interpreted by institutions, can lead to both differentiation and homogenization of institutions. Audit focuses on the one hand on fitness of purpose, that is, institutions’ willingness and ability to engage with and give expression to national priorities and imperatives, particularly in relation to equity, redress and programme responsiveness. On the other hand, audits focus on fitness for purpose in relation to the three core functions of higher education: teaching and learning, research and community engagement. In terms of system differentiation it could be argued that while fitness of purpose through its focus on overriding national goals leads institutions to a potentially homogenizing framework, fitness for purpose through its focus on institutions’ mission and their way of translating it into the three core functions encourages diversity and differentiation.

The tension between homogenization and differentiation in the implementation of a quality assurance regime is compounded by the fact that HEIs are competing for scarce “resources” like students, staff and funding, and that the strategies to attract them are fairly similar. This situation poses a number of challenges to the quality

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4 The audit criteria focus institutional and auditor attention on issues that can be grouped into two categories: first are the macro-level criteria that deal with the fitness of purpose of the institution and examine the mission of the institution, including the manner in which planning and resource allocation reflect the choices implicit in the institution’s mission, and the understanding and organization of the management of quality (three criteria). Second, are the criteria focused on the core functions of teaching and learning (13 criteria), research (two criteria) and community engagement (one criterion).
assurance agency. First, if mission drift is taking place counter to the national policy framework, how should the quality agency look at the fitness for purpose of institutions? Second, in a system in which upward and downward academic drift has accentuated homogenization over differentiation is it possible to use quality as the key differentiator among institutions? Thirdly, is mission/institutional differentiation the only type of differentiation that should be focused on in the context of fitness for purpose, or could programme differentiation at institutions also constitute an area of differentiation? Finally, what are minimum standards of quality that all institutions, irrespective of mission and programme profile must meet in order to provide an acceptable education which is useful and good for individuals and society? What would this mean for the concepts of minimum standards and excellence?

The HEQC finds itself grappling with these issues as its institutional audits move from research intensive institutions which were not affected by the restructuring of higher education to newly merged institutions whose missions and identities are in the process of being defined and given effect through the three core functions.

3. Differentiation in the context of the HEQC Audit Methodology: Training Implications

The specific characteristics of the South African HE system and the imperatives of national policy in higher education, including the role of quality assurance in the restructuring, were taken into account in the design of the auditor preparation workshops run by the HEQC. The design of the workshops was further revised based on the actual experience of the first few audits.

In the context of system restructuring and transformation, the issues of mission differentiation and institution contextualization have become, together with the identification and use of evidence, central features of the HEQC auditor training programme.

The CHE has developed a methodology that brings together in an interpretive report all the nationally audited data pertaining to public higher education institutions. These profiles were first used by the HEQC in the context of preparations for institutional audits in order to balance the tendency to see institutions through the single snapshot of the audit visit. In this sense institutional profiles provide a sense of institutional change in terms of the size, shape and, often, mission of an institution in a ten year period. Institutional profiles take a ten year timeframe and provide a view of institutional data in the areas of teaching and learning inputs and outputs (students enrolments and graduation and staff profile), academic profile (distribution of
enrolments, graduations and staff across disciplines/programmes and level) and research (postgraduate education, research outputs and profile of staff doing research).

The usefulness of the institutional profiles in relation to the audits themselves suggested that they could also be used in the context of auditor training. The purpose of engaging with institutional profiles during training is twofold. On the one hand, the profiles alert potential auditors to the inherent complexity of HEIs. On the other hand, the analysis of data provides a lens with which to read and engage with the institution’s mission and its translation into the three core function areas, especially as set out in the institutional self-evaluation.

The use of the profiles provides to a large extent a “real life situation” for training purposes, since the actual audit portfolios are considered confidential information. Especially from the point of view of mission differentiation, it is not uncommon that mission and planning and performance data do not coincide. In the face of this, the training focuses on developing two approaches - the one questions the consistency between theory and practice with a focus on adapting the practice to the theory, i.e. what an institution should/could do to be consistent with its mission. The other approach focuses on looking at the practice in order to review the mission. The HEQC auditor preparation does not try to resolve the tension between these two approaches. It simply stresses that mission differentiation cannot be read off policy and that even within the same institutional type, e.g. universities of technology or comprehensive universities, there is space for further differentiation.

4. Conclusion: Vivre la difference but how?

In this paper we have shown some of the tensions and contradictions between homogenization and differentiation in the South African higher education system and how the HEQC approach to institutional audits with its focus on fitness of and fitness for purpose could potentially encourage either homogenization or differentiation.

It seems to us that during the first audit cycle, the HEQC’s choice to have a common set of quality requirements for all institutions together with the focus of the audits on issues of transformation understood as equity, redress, and responsiveness was relatively balanced by the examination of the three core functions. However, the fact that, to some extent, the institutions audited so far belong to the same ‘type’, i.e. research intensive universities, has lessened the risk that QA, unwittingly encouraged a homogenizing tendency in the direction of the research university.
The audits with which the HEQC is currently involved pose a different challenge. Merged institutions whose institutional mission has been defined through the restructuring but whose identity as universities of technology or comprehensives is still under construction need to be audited with more rigorous regard for the two analytical movements proposed in our audit training: consistency between mission and practices, and fit between practice and mission seen from a systemic perspective.

In other words, audits will have to pay closer and more specific attention to the examination of the consequences that a choice (or imposition) of mission have for the manner in which the three core functions are conceptualized and translated into practice at each institutional type. What are the differences in the conceptualisation and organization of the three core functions at a research university, a university of technology and a comprehensive institution? How will mission differentiation impact on the relationship between the three core functions? And yet again, what are the fundamental elements that constitute minimum standards of quality at all higher education institutions, without which they could not be recognized as such?

From a system level perspective, quality assurance agencies occupy a privileged position with regard to the information which they generate about higher education institutions. The analysis of the outcomes of audits can show system level trends in the ways in which HEIs position themselves in relation to the issues of fitness of and for purpose. These analyses can show the direct and indirect impact of national policies of differentiation in national higher education systems. Are all institutions producing the same type of graduates and research outputs? Have specialised niches been developed in relation to institutions’ strengths and areas of potential and regional/national environment? And, most importantly, is differentiation always good and desirable regardless of the specific history and circumstances of higher education systems?

For quality assurance agencies to engage with these issues, it will be necessary to move from being only the implementers of a set of systems and technologies to be also the reflective monitors of the effects of quality assurance on policy and of policy on quality assurance. It is important that the work of agencies is informed by debates in and research on higher education and social policy in general.
Abstract: Quality measurement undoubtedly plays a very important though also clearly ambivalent role within any quality assurance system. The Quality Culture approach on the other hand – particularly in a more interactionist perspective - is an approach that is barely compatible with more control- and management-oriented strategies. In this proposal we want to critically discuss some of the major pitfalls of an overly measurement-oriented Quality Culture and how such a culture could be affected in a rather counterproductive manner. At the same time, we intend to outline some options for dealing with those problems without compromising the initial idea.

Quality is certainly one of the major ‘buzzwords’ within the international Higher Education community, leading to an overabundance of publications dedicated to strategies and practices on how to ‘manage’ and ‘assure’ quality. One of the more interesting contributions in recent times is the Quality Culture approach, which is heavily promoted by the European University Association (cf. EUA 2006, 2005; Sursock 2004). The concept’s growing popularity can be largely accredited to its emphasis on cultural and value-based dimensions, offering an easily acceptable alternative to its more management-oriented and top-down-directed alternatives. It has to be stated though, that the concept is still underdeveloped in terms of theory, especially with regard to the meaning(s) of culture within the overall framework. In our own approach to the concept, Quality Cultures are conceived as stakeholder-dependent, historically grown and learning-oriented social phenomena, thus shifting attention to the latent factors and ‘underlying assumptions’ of organisational (inter)actions and interpretations (cf. Vettori, Lueger & Knassmueller 2007).

In the following sections we are offering some further reflections on the Quality-Culture relationship by contrasting a rather functionalist view with a more interactionist understanding of culture. Within this analytical framework, we will discuss some of the major pitfalls of an overly measurement-oriented Quality Culture and how it could be affected in a rather counterproductive manner. Based on three theses, we will show that our concerns are certainly not directed against quality measurement per se, but at a certain lack of reflexiveness regarding the use of measured data, especially if the actors involved possess too little knowledge or adhere to incorrect assumptions about how these data come about. In our final section we will outline some options for dealing with those problems without compromising the initial idea.

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Turning Quality Cultures upside down

The quality-component of the Quality Culture approach usually attracts more attention than its cultural equivalent, often resulting in discussions about quality’s multi-dimensional and stakeholder-dependent (ergo: hardly observable) character. Quality in Higher Education has already been comprehensively debated in the past decade (cf., among many others, Newton 2007, Carstensen & Hoffmann 2004, Harvey & Green 1993), yet somehow the debate seems to be stagnating lately, which could be partly ascribed to the difficulties of making the concept ‘manageable’ for practical purposes. Shifting the focus by taking a closer look on the concept(s) of culture might at least partly help to bring some fresh ideas into this process.

In our approach to culture, we are giving particular attention to the latent aspects of organisational phenomena, which often tend to get marginalised in more management-oriented perspectives. Even if such aspects are often difficult to grasp and may be unconscious to the actors themselves, they are still becoming manifest in action patterns and symbolical forms of expression. In this regard, Schein (2004) is analytically separating three different levels of culture: artefacts (visible organisational structures), espoused values (strategies, goals and philosophies) and basic underlying assumptions (unconscious, taken for granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings). Accordingly, culture can be hardly understood as a homogeneous entity, even though it may refer to a horizon of shared social meaning (by simultaneously distinguishing itself from other horizons of social meaning/cultures). Internally, each culture can be differentiated into various subcultures, which adds a second level of complexity/heterogeneity. As a consequence, (shared) cultural premises are an important foundation for reciprocal understanding, while the borders between various cultures and subcultures are often starting points for misunderstanding and misinterpretations.

The ways quality and culture can be related to each other certainly have important consequences for quality management and quality assurance strategies. In this paper we identify at least two fundamentally different approaches to organisational/quality culture, which may even be seen as opposing frameworks for managerial actions and procedures: a rather functionalist approach (framing quality as an aim that is strived for) and a more interactionist approach (defining quality as a result of multiple organisational actions and interactions that is very difficult to control and manage). Both understandings shall be briefly outlined in the following paragraphs:

- Within the functionalist approach, organisational culture is understood as one factor (among others), which fulfils a certain function for the organisation and its success and which can be rationally managed. By forming and managing such a culture (which becomes manifest in organisational artefacts and collective behavioural patterns such as rituals or ceremonies), it is intended to integrate and motivate the members of the organisation. From this perspective, organisational cultures can be created and consciously shaped, a task best fulfilled by certain key players, e.g. incorporators (cf. Martin et al 1985), executives or institutional ‘heroes’. It is thus not very surprising that this approach is mainly discussed in more management-oriented disciplines (cf. Ebers 1985, Peters & Waterman 1984).

In this theoretical perspective, quality is basically a goal that should be attained, requiring a clear and demand-oriented understanding (definition) of what quality actually is and how it can be obtained. Such conceptual specifications are mostly leading to models of cause and effect: Which factors are goal-supportive and which are rather impedient? How can these factors be influenced? What actions should be taken? In order to systematically advance this process, an organisation needs information on the level of goal achievement and sufficient data about actions taken and their particular impact/success. Consequently, (quantitative) evaluations and data measurement play an important role for supporting this type of ‘culture management’.
The interactionist approach, on the other hand, draws strongly on the social constructivist considerations of Berger and Luckmann (1980) and was further developed in the works of Froschauer 1997, Morgan (1997), Weick (1994), Frost et al. (1991, 1985), Smircich (1985, 1983), Allaire & Firsirotu (1984) or Pondy et al. (1983). In this perspective, an organisational culture is emerging from the interactions of various actors involved in the organisation. It can be seen as a framework of collective structures of social meaning (generated through interactive processes of sense making) and thereby creating the premises for specific perceptions and actions. Geertz (1993, p 145) gets this idea very much to the point: “Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations.”

Since premises for acting as well as actions and events themselves are subject to permanent interpretation, an organisational culture is in a state of continuous and dynamic change. In addition, such a culture is not necessarily homogeneous, reflecting an organisation’s internal complexity. As a result, a university’s culture has to be conceived as a historically grown social phenomenon that is very likely differentiated into several subcultures, but without guaranteeing that the participants are completely aware of the differences.

In this theoretical perspective, quality development seems a very complicated endeavour with uncertain results: As all actions are more or less based on quality notions that are collectively developed and shared by various organisational members, quality-oriented interventions cannot be restricted to goals and outcomes, but have to focus on the underlying assumptions, i.e. social rules, norms and values. This is certainly not made easier by the fact that such norms and values are rarely explicit and concrete; they are rather latently incorporated in daily practices and interactions, defying any attempt of accessing them directly. As a result, quality is emerging in a dynamic and self-referential way, rendering any hope of direct control impossible. Interventions are possible, but mainly by raising awareness for certain quality notions, by fostering constant exchange of quality ideas and by initiating a process of implementing self-imposed strategies.

If we take a concluding look at both approaches, it soon becomes clear that the main differences lie in the way culture is conceived and accordingly dealt with. In the functionalist approach, culture is very much functionalised for achieving pre-defined quality goals, e.g. by using the concept of ‘corporate culture’ as a means for shaping an organisation’s identity or its members in accordance with an institution’s mission or managerial standards. In the interactionist view, culture is very much understood as a complex and dynamic construct with rules of its own, impeding its manageability and hindering the predictability of future developments: Here, premises for perceptions and actions are only slowly changing and cannot be directly tackled, while quality goals as well as the means to achieve them are depending on processes of interaction and interpretation. As we will see, both approaches have considerable impact on the way measurements can be incorporated into the organisational QA systems and on the way the organisational Quality Culture will finally evolve.

The role of quality measurement and the pitfalls of measuring quality

It seems plausible that quality assurance (QA) systems in higher education are often closer to functionalist understandings of organisational culture, as they offer clearer and more straightforward models of management and leadership as well as factors of success that are actually tangible and comparable. In order to produce such evidence of success (and thereby meet external and internal accountability demands), QA systems rely on data which inform decision-makers about the level of goal achievement, provide an acceptable basis for decision-making and allow for an easier assessment of a strategy’s effectiveness and efficiency. This is often done by adopting summative evaluations and assessments, i.e. drawing a balance at a given point of time. In order to reduce efforts and guarantee
comparability over a long course of time, it is reasonable to standardise procedures and systematise them. On the other hand, the quality of such evaluations significantly depends on the quality of the cause-and-effect models they are based on. Thus, what looks rather positive on first view can have some serious consequences for an institution’s quality culture, changing the fundament on which this culture is based on and in the long run even thwarting the best intentions. The following three theses provide more detailed reasoning on the dangers linked with an overly measurement-oriented strategy:

1) **Quality measurement defines (and even creates) quality**

This first thesis might cause some initial irritations: Should it not be the other way round? Any kind of measurement reduces the complexity of social reality by defining the object that is to be measured through operationalisations and an assignment of measurable values. What seems trivial at first glance, has some far-reaching consequences for the construct under consideration, depending on its degree of complexity. Quality can undoubtedly be described as a highly complex, dynamically changing and perspective-bound construct, rendering any satisfactory operationalisation of quality as such nearly impossible. Nevertheless, most Higher Education institutions are busily assessing quality, restraining their efforts to those aspects that are actually measurable (with preferably little effort).

Yet by taking a very specific perspective on the phenomenon under consideration, measurements are not only reducing reality, but in many aspects even constituting it. Decisions are often based on indicators and similar constructions, leading to an equalisation of quality measurements with the measured phenomenon itself. If an organisation adopts such an approach, this may well lead to observable improvements regarding the indicators – yet first and foremost because the relevant actors have learned to adapt and to pay regard to the measurement requirements in their daily work (or at least in their reporting). In this regard, quality measurement is starting to (re)shape the existent quality culture on both, manifest and latent levels.

Such developments are further boosted by political/public demands for accountability: It seems very plausible that the legitimation of an organisation’s quality efforts are primarily geared towards those criteria that are easily comprehensible and ‘marketable’, e.g. the number of publications, impact factors, ranking positions, course evaluations, student-staff-ratios or the level of third party funding. On the other hand, such proceedings have significant influence on how quality is perceived and (re)constructed: The focus is increasingly shifted to formal aspects, which can be (more or less) easily transformed into measurable indicators, making internal processes apparently more transparent for an interested environment. Thereby, this strategy soon affects quality notions themselves, replacing them – polemically spoken – by numbers and continuously invisibilising the underlying assumptions.

2) **Quality measurement affects quality – yet not always for the better**

Quality management systems are usually aiming at ensuring and improving quality and thus require some kind of proof of their success. Since procedures of quantification are especially suited for providing evidence for ‘improvements’, many QA systems are prone to continuously organised measurement activities. In doing so, quality measurement is not only influencing quality perceptions but also concrete actions. There are two types of effects linked to this situation: a) Qualitative changes such as cultural developments can barely be measured and are consequently getting more and more overlooked; b) as most measured data do not include information on how they came about, measurement-oriented strategies are very much dependent on an adequate interpretation of such data. Thus, improvement-oriented efforts can paradoxically lead to obverse results if the attributions of cause and effect are inadequate or based on incorrect assumptions.
Presuming scientific careers are very much reliant on the number of publications in internationally renowned and refereed journals, scientists would certainly be well advised to develop appropriate career plans, e.g. by selecting their areas of research based on opportunities for publication or by fragmentising their research results in order to utilise them several times. Such strategies may require a high quality research management but do not necessarily result in innovative high quality research per se. Presuming that a teacher’s reputation depends at least partly on the results of his or her course evaluations, teachers would be well advised to work on their performances in order to engage their students’ sympathy. Again, such a strategy cannot be equalised with improving quality, reducing the construct’s complexity to a rather one-dimensional figure.

3) Quality measurement systems are self-referential

Quality is not only of internal relevance, but is more and more becoming a key factor for distinction and competition in the international Higher Education sector. Thereby, universities have to provide evidence that they are going to any lengths in order to ensure and improve the quality of their processes or outcomes. This is largely achieved by standardising quality measurements, apparently allowing for demonstrative comparability. However, this comparability remains a dubious achievement: As most universities can be characterised as organisations with a high degree of internal differentiation/heterogeneity, standards can rarely claim general validity. This is even truer for inter-institutional comparisons or comparisons over a longer period of time. Nevertheless, once a particular frame of (self)reference is established it is very unlikely to be abandoned soon.

Polemically spoken, a university cannot afford not to measure quality, as such abandonment might well raise suspicions. And in many ways it has lots of advantages to follow well-tried paths instead of breaking stony new ground as DiMaggio and Powell (1991) have shown in their work on mimetic processes, normative pressures and coercion as mechanisms of institutional isomorphic change: On one hand, Higher Education institutions tend to copy models that have already been approved, especially if there is only a limited number of alternatives available. On the other hand, such institutions also face a growing pressure to professionalise their own models in order to meet the standards set by governmental institutions, accreditation agencies or legal restraints. As a result, Measurement systems that have proved to be successful (as well as easily manageable) are adopted as good practices, but often without sufficient reflection on the actual object that is being measured. This leads to the not very satisfactory situation that evaluations (e.g. the already omnipresent course evaluations) are often conducted for their own sake, becoming part of their own legitimation.

Concluding, it cannot be denied that quality measurement provides important information on various processes and outcomes. Yet if such measurements are transformed into a bureaucratically organised system, the side effects and unintended consequences can at least countervail the intended results if not prevail them. Rindermann (2003: 248f.) argues that many evaluative actions require considerable resources, often at the expense of the evaluand itself. In addition, many evaluations can even be counterproductive, if the actors involved (e.g. teachers, researchers) are offering resistance instead of acceptance. Hundt (2000) critically observes that most instruments for teaching evaluation are merely scratching the didactic surface without adequate consideration of structural and content-related aspects. Thus, quality measurement per se does not automatically lead to quality improvements. Nevertheless, finding measurable criteria seems one of the most important steps of any quality assurance strategy. The question of how to interpret such criteria, once they are implemented, draws far less attention, even though many problems are just emerging during the interpretation process.
Supporting measurements

Our previous considerations were intended to bring forward the argument that a mainly functionalist Quality Culture approach may be insufficient, as the consequences of its necessarily strong measurement orientation will undermine its own objectives, altering the organisational culture in a rather unfavourable way. In this approach, complexity is (necessarily) reduced by defining quality indicators that represent the underlying causal models, but at a certain time the reductions are often interpreted as an image of organisational reality itself, equalising those quality indicators with quality. Consequently, actions based on such indicators/data can lose track of the actual requirements. In addition, neither the university management nor a particular QA unit (or accreditation body) are able to achieve/guarantee quality on their own; quality is rather “produced” and negotiated in various stakeholder actions and interactions, involving teachers, researchers, administrators, corporate representatives – and students. If these stakeholders are – even symbolically – relieved from the responsibility for their own (quality) actions, they will be rather demotivated and resist the (measurement) procedures imposed upon them, while the university management would soon be overtaxed with guaranteeing quality on their own. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that shifting responsibility cannot be equalised with holding someone to account for results based on indicators that were externally imposed; such an ambivalent strategy will even more excuse the other actors from taking “ownership” and dispossess them of their autonomy by showing distrust in their competences and commitment (cf. Hoecht 2006).

An interactionist approach to Quality Culture meets such concerns by shifting responsibilities and competences from the management to various other actors. In this perspective, quality measurements gain a different meaning: They are not primarily an instrument of top down control, but a tool for getting feedback and providing orientation on various levels, e.g. by helping teachers to relate their own experiences to differing viewpoints or by assisting program managers with identifying structural problems within their program portfolios. In order to make such feedback-systems work, all relevant indicators and measurements will have to take the requirements of the actors concerned into account or ideally should even be co-determined by them. By enabling stakeholder groups to develop their own quality goals, initiatives and measures (which, admittedly, will have to be negotiated at a certain point), they are able to take process ownership and consequently share responsibility for organisational developments (cf. the more qualitative approaches to evaluation, e.g. by Patton 2002, Fetterman 2001, Shaw 1999). The data may not be so different from those produced and used in the functionalist approach discussed above, but they are very much put into perspective by contextualising them and by pointing out their limits. In addition, such data are subject to a process of permanent change and re-innovation, just as the organisational culture itself. As a result, this will aggravate any attempts of comparing data over a long course of time or relating them to information from differing organisational contexts.

Consequently, follow ups play a pivotal role within this negotiationary approach to quality criteria and their measurement. They help to raise acceptance for evaluation results and ensure a certain degree of obligingness. Failures are interpreted as indicators for certain shortcomings (e.g. concerning measures, environmental conditions or the underlying theoretical model) and require phases of systematic and reflective treatment. The handling of such follow up procedures provides valuable information on whether the actors’ trust and confidence are justified. In this regard they are an important factor for stabilising a quality culture and for learning about central norms and values. In order to strengthen reciprocal trust, the quality assurance system should show clearly and transparently what happens with the data and how they are used.

Such arguing finally leads us to an issue that should generally be considered to a greater extent – the interpretation of quality indicators and performance data: In most cases, an adequate use of measurements and data is certainly not manageable, yet the actors and stakeholders confronted with such data can be supported in order to interpret these data in a constructive way and with regard to stakeholder-dependent differences in perspective. Details on what particular data reveal and what they
do not should already be part of communicating the data from the beginning. Otherwise, data (models) could too quickly be transferred to other contexts, where they have far less explanatory value. However, as soon as such practices become common practices and possibly even enter the level of organisational norms and values, they are no longer called into question. As a result, problems emerging from inadequate procedures can hardly be dealt with if even identified. By taking an interactionist approach such phenomena can at least be uncovered and explained – although a functionalist approach might better agree with more control-oriented strategies.

But even if one decides for the second option, it seems reasonable to bear in mind that not everything that can be measured actually should be measured: data primarily have supportive character. From this point of view, methodical precision is not always the most important criterion: A quality culture rather relies on a reciprocal communicational exchange and negotiation of differing quality notions, as they will – at least implicitly – affect organisational perceptions and actions in day-to-day business.

References


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Introduction:
Tunisian higher education is a typical example of the developing countries, state-funded and controlled one. For the last fifty years since independence, the government has provided a free higher education to all those who succeed in the national baccalaureate exams. As many other centralised higher education systems, the role of government in higher education has swung from total laissez faire to extreme state control. The government owns, finances, and operates higher education institutions. The ministry has dictated degree requirements and curricula. It has also controlled staff recruitment and promotion. The situation has been more or less manageable until the number of higher education students more than doubled in the last decade.

Both internal and external factors have contributed to the government’s decision to launch the projet d’appui à la qualité (PAQ) the national quality project and ask institutions to compete for grants. The circular letter (06/32 dated June, 3rd 2006) describes some of these factors as follows:

- The growing need to enhance the Tunisian higher education competitiveness both locally and internationally
- The necessity to enable Tunisian graduates to compete in the international labour market
- The need to draw foreign investment capitals by providing a high number of well trained graduates in the scientific and technological fields
- The need to provide Tunisian companies with well trained graduates
- To facilitate the development of a knowledge economy
- The need to prepare the Tunisian higher education institutions for competition when the sector will be open for international funds
- To stand competition, higher education institutions are required to win the “battle” of quality in the training field. (Author’s translation).

Research on institutional change used to define resistance as the enemy of change, the foe which causes a change effort to be drawn out by factional dissent and in-fighting. The prescription of this viewpoint was to eliminate resistance, quash it early and sweep it aside in order to make way for the coming change (Croy 2000, Drennan , 2001). Resistance has been defined as employee behavior that seeks to challenge, disrupt, or invert prevailing assumptions, discourses, and power relations. Following current models of organizational improvement, change managers are guided to take steps to create consensus for a common vision. In getting people on board with the changes, however, managers can be tempted to be overly optimistic and can oversell the potential benefits while overlooking potential undesirable aspects of the change. Employees, however, might use the company communication as an anchor for their expectations. If actual outcomes of change fall short of the expected outcome, including the possibility that change can take longer than expected, employees can experience a sense of violation.

The aim of this paper is (1) to try to portray the academics’ resistance to the PAQ tenders and conceptions of quality (2) to analyse the reasons behind such resistance and (3) to suggest possible ways to overcome such resistance.
Method:
The research method included a survey and face-to-face interviews. The survey aimed to find out whether the lecturers are aware of the existence of the PAQ, whether they have participated in the bidding process as well as their conceptions of quality. The questionnaires were followed by interviews of 22 lecturers among those who did not participate in the first tender. The semistructured interviews were conducted at four Tunisian tertiary institutions all situated in the region of Tunis. Each of the 22 interviews lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and was audio-taped for the purpose of transcribing. The transcriptions remain confidential to the author and, in the translated excerpts quoted below, individuals and institutions remain anonymous.

Data Analysis
Survey and interview data have been analysed using the constant comparative method, with its primary aim to identify main categories and patterns in collected qualitative data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The method combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained. Following Strauss & Corbin (1994, 1996) procedures of writing rules of inclusion when rethinking about data which fit into certain category, certain proposed statements have been derived from refined categories revealing the main draft of research outcomes. Data was sieved to answer the following questions:
1. How was the quality project (PAQ) perceived by the lecturers?
2. How was quality in higher education conceptualised?
3. Which factors discouraged academics from participating in bidding?
4. What could be done in order to overcome these obstacles?

Results
Various potential barriers to the successful implementation of the first phase of PAQ emerged from the surveys and the interviews. These barriers can be placed within one of four categories. Table 1 presents a listing of the reasons or impediments named by surveyed and interviewed academics for the lack of participation in the PAQ tender and of their related beliefs about quality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impediments</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never heard of the tender</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heard but didn’t understand</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misinformed</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tender necessity</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tender words</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality project</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misconceptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality for the rich countries</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality as perfection</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality as supervision</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistrust</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No “real” reasons</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepotism and corruption</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just politics</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of clear concept definition</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of agreement</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Percentage of academics citing a particular impediment to quality and to the PAQ
It is important to note that Table 1 should not be interpreted as suggesting that all the respondents implicated all 14 of the impediments. Generally speaking, an item was included as an impediment when approximately one-third or more of the respondents supported the item’s inclusion.

Lack of information
To the question of whether the respondents were aware of the existence of the PAQ, the survey revealed that 25% or the respondents claim that they have never heard of the tender or of the PAQ and that they have not seen the circular letters for a number of different reasons. Others maintain that they saw it but that they did not understand what it really meant. The interviews contained more instances of the circular letter not reaching all members of staff and of other instances where ignoring or hiding the circular letter was a sign of silent resistance.

Lack of understanding
When asked about the reasons why they didn’t participate in the first tender, most respondents protested that they did neither understand quality or the nature nor the wording of the tender. To illustrate, one respondent confessed his inability to come to grips with the metaphor of quality in higher education, though he described himself as ‘quite familiar with quality in industry’ (Respondent 12, a senior lecturer in management). He explained that his biggest problem was to “visualise quantifying outcomes … how can we measure higher education?”

Most respondents complained about the language used in the tender and in other circular letters concerning quality. One respondent described how he felt he needed someone to “translate” the tender for him. Another criticised the language used in circular letters as being “bossy, arrogant and ignorant” and when asked about what he means by ignorant he said that these letters treat lecturers as “on/off buttons in a factory line”.

One of the respondents read aloud the introduction to the circular letter (06/32) introducing the PAQ. She kept saying that the language is very “political” that you could easily replace the words related to higher education with any other sector such as industry or agriculture and the “text would still read fine”. She concluded by saying:

‘I do not have time for politics … I do not trust politicians … once they talk about my real problems teaching in these conditions … then I would buy the argument … right now … I do not even listen … anyway … politicians end up doing whatever they like to … with or without the teachers’ consent’ (Respondent 5 senior lecturer psychology)

Misconceptions
The interviews revealed that the confusion and lack of understanding of the concept of quality were causing tensions.

‘If quality is a national challenge … then funding should be equally divided on universities. Why should some institutions get the chance to get more money and so more advantage?’ (Respondent 1 lecturer physics)
‘Any quality project must be preceded by a national evaluation program. We evaluate everything … then we change whatever needs to be changed in ALL institutions’ (Respondent 3 senior lecturer Arabic language)
‘WE define quality … each department defines its own norms and standards of quality … why adapt any ready made definition?’ (Respondent 4 senior lecturer geography)

To most respondents, quality is portrayed as perfection. They complained that the working conditions in the Tunisian universities are so bad that it is difficult for them to even “talk” about quality when
“mediocrity reigns”. Respondents keep using metaphors and telling stories of bad, difficult of impossible stories of working conditions:
‘How are we expected to talk about quality when we sometimes can’t find chalk? … when we see large groups of students crammed in small rooms? … when I have to seat three or four students round the same computer?’ (Respondents 10, 12 and 15)

Others described quality as ‘fit for rich developed countries’ and lengthily analysed how none can do better in a massive free higher education.
Other interviewees think that they ought to resist quality in higher education because changing one part does not change the whole. They believe that there are so many other domains to be “perfected” not the least secondary and primary education.

*Mistrust*

Most respondents articulated signs of worrying and mistrust. To them, quality rhymes with inspection. Some other respondents did not see any difference between this “new” project and older ones. They described these projects as being ruled by the same processes of nepotism, corruption and political opportunism.

Others feel that this project is unnecessarily secretive and vague. They blame the ministry for not telling them the “real” reasons for change and for not involving them in the process of decision-making. One of the respondents confessed that he knows most of the administrators involved in this project and doubts if any of them has any through or even correct understanding of quality.
Respondents referred to the little time provided (3 days minimum two weeks maximum) and the bad timing (end of the academic year July 2006) in the bidding process as a “planned strategy”.
‘I really wanted to take part … but I just couldn’t request more work from my colleagues. … with all the corrections and the juries we had all to endure … it was practically impossible … I imagined that nobody could meet the deadline … well I was wrong …’
(Respondent 22 senior lecturer accountancy, head of department)

The respondents showed signs of discomfort towards what they described as “inevitable bias” of the selection and approval procedure of the quality projects. They hinted to the fact that as the project is administered by the ministry and the evaluators are selected and “paid” by the ministry then it is difficult to have an independent quality project whose evaluators are “immune” from all relevant sources of influence and interest. To these respondents, quality is just to further widen the gap between “important” scientific and technological fields and “less important” human and social science fields and between powerful collegiate and less powerful ones. One of the respondents expressed his deepest worry that:

We are going to have a *Tunisified* version of quality …. A quality system won’t change anything unless the people themselves change the way they think. Quality or not … the powerful ones will get more power and the weaker ones will get less (Respondents 21 senior lecturer accountancy)

We can’t change anything …. the ministry ties our hands very tight … we have no autonomy at all … They ask you to take part in projects … and then you end up doing exactly what they expect you to do … I do not see professors having any power … all these committee meetings are a mere masquerade … Deans used to have a lot of power which they have lost … now we all have to abide by the rules and expectations … no initiative … no freedom …and it is NOT a quality system that will change things … we need a different set of laws (Respondent 4 professor history)
Role tensions

Academics inertia can be a substantial barrier to the success of the PAQ and to any serious attempt to quality enhancement at the Tunisian higher education. Respondents expected the ministry to “realise” the quality project or at least to give detailed instructions on how to do it. None of the respondents showed signs of taking the initiative to start change. Some of them described the project as “their project so let them realise it” referring to the ministry’s administrators. Such polarised belief systems position the person as victim. They limit the potential for initiating and taking part in change, since the underlying assumption is that an external power – ‘they’ – hold the power for change.

Certain comments, coming mostly from younger teaching staff are questioning the degree in which taking the initiative to suggest an idea for a quality project is a business of younger staff, who is just starting his/her career and should concentrate completely on discipline-oriented matters (teaching and research). Similar resistance to participation in decision making is also feature of senior lecturers.

“They do not listen to me any way … I have never succeeded in convincing them of anything” (Respondent 9 senior lecturer accountancy)

“I do not have time to waste on quality projects … as it has to go via the department and the faculty … the same people who decide on everything will decide on this one as well…” (Respondent 11 senior lecturer Maths)

“Our head of department is very old fashioned …. He will never even try to listen to revolutionary” projects…. I’d rather not upset him … He was my teacher and supervisor … I owe him a lot of respect” (Respondent 10 Lecturer chemistry)

Matter of belonging is also slightly highlighted. Many participants reflected on the fact that they are kept at a distance. One respondent complained that because of the rarity of department meetings, she gets no chance to hear of what goes on in the department. Many academic staff don’t feel tight belonging to their institutions. Many lack the right space to work in or to gather socially. A considerable number of academic staff come to their institutions only for their lectures or if necessary for their department meetings.

Consistency

As the concept of quality is new to the majority of lecturers and administrators, there seems to be flawed and inconsistent understanding of the terms of the tender or of the roles of different quality committees or still of the mission of higher education. There should be more electronic definitions and background information available to all interested users to ensure a minimum guarantee of consistency. Agents of change working on different implicit inconsistent definitions of quality and their respective roles would rather unwillingly hamper the process of change. In a culture of total absence of accountability, it is difficult to advance change in the absence of a minimum level of consistency.

The data collected for this study contains no instance where any of the respondents showed signs of awareness or agreement with the ministry’s declared aims of the quality project as discussed in the introduction above. This mismatch between administrators’ and lecturers’ conceptions and understanding is to be taken seriously if any genuine change is attempted at the Tunisian higher education institutions. Academics are not to be accused of failing to understand administrators but as simply having different views and conceptions from those of management.

Ways forward in overcoming the Tunisian academics’ resistance to PAQ and to quality in higher education

Academics’ resistance to the quality project should not be taken lightly. unless such resistance is understood and considered as an integral and healthy part of the change process, no real change can be achieved. The Tunisian quality project seems to have a problem with faculty commitment to the overall quality effort. The respondents showed a tremendous amount of organizational inertia to overcome. It is important to define the process for change as well as the processes needed for quality management.
The obstacles identified above i.e. lack of understanding, lack of information and lack of trust are the easiest to overcome in the institutional change literature. In accordance, Pennington (2003) proposes the following strategies for dealing with ‘resistance’ which the Tunisian higher education might well consider:

- information giving, education and targeted communication
- creating increased opportunities for participation and involvement (for example; working parties, task groups)
- facilitation and training support to build confidence and competence
- persuasion and negotiation to establish common ground
- limited amounts of catharsis and direct encounter/challenges.

Educating and empowering change agents have been the mostly used techniques for overcoming resistance to change in higher education institutions.

**Educating change agents:**
Tunisian academics are in an urgent need for hands-on information of quality in higher education. Basic information, multilingual glossaries, background information on international past experiences, access to related research and discussion lists all help provide information and dissipate rumours and misconceptions. Workshops and seminars with as many academic staff as possible will help everybody develop a visualisation of what a quality project looks like, how to turn an idea into a project or to identify and use indicators, benchmarking or any other major quality tool or concept.

**Empowering change agents:**
Consultation should be real, comprehensive and seen to make a difference and should occur before policies are drawn not after they are drawn. Academics have shown a great deal of negative beliefs where there is a real issue of power. Cynism about organizational change, the loss of faith in the leaders of change and a history of less-than-successful attempts at change, has been portrayed in the literature as a serious obstacle to effective quality enhancement programs.

The circular letters on quality as well as the procedure manual do not stipulate who really carries the change. There is a very naive understanding that quality is the automatic result of acquiring better equipment. There is no clear benefit for the staff who is directly involved in quality projects. There is no clear conceptualisation of the processes of change. Most of these documents is devoted to controlling much more than guiding or encouraging a quality culture. Administrators seem to assume that those institutions who bid will be inevitably « better » and those who didn’t will have to follow. Lecturers, however, think whether you bid or not, a quality project is not to change the way things are. Probably, each higher education institution should take a more active position towards quality. Each institution, for instance, should think of creating a quality steering committee that would include administrators and faculty members and that would provide critical mass of support for the process management intervention.

**Conclusion**
This study set out to portray Tunisian academics’ resistance to the PAQ, their underlying conceptions of quality and the ways to overcome such resistance. The interview and survey findings suggest that the perceived impediments to the PAQ and to quality enhancement can be grouped under five headings: lack of information, lack of understanding, misconceptions, mistrust and inconsistency. Contained with these groupings are such factors as inadequate resources, inadequate approach and overwhelming academics inertia. Qualitative results show that academics’ resistance is not to quality as such as much as to the way it is introduced. They also show that the respondents suffer mostly from lack of information, lack of understanding and mistrust and that these three problems are the easiest to
overcome by providing information and by implying academic staff more directly in massive reform decisions. Positive change is only likely to be realized through the adoption of a more vigorous and proactive approach. It is probable that this latter approach will require a rethinking of the way higher education stakeholders operate and cooperate. The Tunisian first experience with implementing quality points to the scarcity of research on the higher education institutions and departments inside culture. We are very probably in a position of ignoring what the right decision to take simply because we have no explicit or even approximate understanding of the type of higher education we have.

**Works cited:**


Introduction:

Even as the quality Assurance in HE is coming of an age, there exists a different world where higher education itself is struggling to come out of infancy. The old debate of quality verses equality remains valid with added dimension of quantity. Despite different issues and priorities, for the developed world and the developing ones, there is growing awareness about need of quality in higher education {HE} across the board, thanks to efforts Quality Assurance Agencies [QAAs]. The paper attempts to reflect on how these maturing QA mechanisms have succeeded in responding to quality concerns while accommodating the nuances of massification of higher education.

It focuses on quality concerns of policy makers where issues of access and equity are equally or more important to serve the societal and individual needs. It also examines Indian experience of National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) which is in process of reviewing its model after experience of over a decade in experiments of quality assuring in huge and diverse HE system.
Need for massification:
The UNESCO’s 1998 World Conference has adopted a World Declaration on Higher Education. It indicates that there exists a great discrepancy between the proportions of people who have access to higher education. 40-50% age participation rates are becoming the norm in developed countries, whereas in some developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, APRs remain below 5%. India, which boasts of having the third largest HE system in the world has enrolment ratio that hovers around 12%.

This has resulted into demand for massification of higher education in many countries.

Quality, Equality and Quantity:
In this context of ground realities, the HE systems in developing countries are facing new challenge of cross-border offerings. Thus the challenges are manifold - addressing the issues of access and equity locally and competing with quality globally.

In the context of mass requirement of higher education, quality is not to be described in terms of excellence of a few but in terms of uniformly good performance across the sector. Quality education at affordable cost is also an equally critical issue.

Some reflections:
When we talk about maturing of Quality Assurance systems we need to reflect on following:

- Whether Quality Assurance and Concern of Equality & Participation still confront each other?
- Does Quality Assurance remain an elitist process or it is embracing inclusive approach?
- Can affirmative action be an excuse to offer low quality Higher Education provision?
- If scarce national resources in developing countries are being invested in Higher Education, then is not it more relevant to demand quality as value for money?
- How far is Peer review process feasible in HE systems like that of India’s size?
- Are there any alternative models to take care of huge number and diversity?
- Will online Assessment and Accreditation be reality in a near future?
- Can voluntary accreditation work in Mass HE systems?
- Which pattern of outcome and usage of accreditation result is more appropriate and sustainable?

Experience of NAAC in India:
The large size with 356 Universities and 17,625 Colleges enrolling more than 10 million students and the huge diversity of HEIs in the federal setup of India gives a good example to draw lessons from. Established in the year 1994 the NAAC has made several experiments in its history of over decade. Accreditation of about 3085 Institutions including 131 Universities and 3074 Colleges has been completed till date.
From the initial phase of apprehension, the NAAC has gradually been able to build a greater appreciation for intrinsic benefits of accreditation. In its decade long existence NAAC has introduced and popularized concept of external peer review in HEIs in India. It has facilitated innovations and promotion of good practices across the HE sector.

The Concerns:
The list of apprehensions and concerns of NAAC is also quite illustrative.

- **The unbeatable Numbers**: So far NAAC has accredited about 3000 HEIs out of total nearing 17,000.
- **Voluntary Vs Mandatory**: The bottom line is that voluntary accreditation could not give desired results in Mass higher education set up. It has worked in states wherever made mandatory.
- **The Grading debate**: The debate over the desirability of grades as an assessment outcome is ongoing. Lack of usage of outcome has made NAAC to rethink about grading.
- **Program vs. Institution**: In reality, the NAAC couldn’t venture into program accreditation due to lack of capacity in terms of manpower and infrastructure.
- **Foreign Operators — the policy vacuum**: The Indian government is yet to declare a policy position on the entry of foreign operators into the country.
- **Need for National QA Framework**: There is a felt need for a national quality assurance framework and nodal agency to coordinate and integrate the functions of the various players engaged in accreditation.
- **Frequent Reviews**: While constant examination and reflections are good to suit dynamic nature of QA in HE, it is also seen as negative sign to change the policy with changing policymakers.

Lessons from experience:
Experiences in India as well as other countries indicate need to device own strategies and models, which may consider:

- Adopting “Inclusive” concept of Quality embracing Access and Equity.
- Autonomy and transparency of the QA process even though Government support is critical.
- Bringing all HEIs under the ambit of Quality Assurance and providing single point reference to international HE community is crucial to benefit from globalization process.
- National HE systems and QA mechanisms to be driven by long-term vision with clear policy objectives, with less political interference
- Internal Quality assurance systems as pre-condition for external QA.
- E-assessment systems to address the problem of assessment of large numbers.
- Concern for quality to be matched by adequate resources.

- Common understanding of terms, models, criteria and procedures for QA.
- The National QA frameworks to embrace all types of provision of HE such as private, distance, online and cross-border operations.

- Adequate Safeguards and Strategic opening to foreign providers to advance interests of stakeholders.

- Providers from developed world to appreciate that Costs are critical in developing economies.
To sum up:

The growing concern about the quality of education at all levels necessitates the policy makers to focus on quality enhancement of higher education, by promoting excellence at all levels in the education pyramid.

The Higher Education Quality Assurance policymakers have an uphill task ahead of them in coming up with convincing answers to such concerns and adopting enduring solutions, if Quality assurance has to consolidate as reliable and sustainable strategy for development of higher education in the knowledge society. It is expected that collecting and collating experiences from various QA agencies to draw the lessons for further fine-tuning the QA methodologies, policies and practices will be one of such strategies.
Abstract

Issues of quality and excellence are the greatest challenges faced by Indian Higher Education Institutions. The national Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), which is the Indian national quality assurance agency for higher education institutions is advocating the best practices benchmarking approach for quality enhancement in higher education institutions. NAAC lays emphasis on internal benchmarking and building and strengthening the internal quality assurance systems in the higher education institutions. In other words NAAC focuses on the effectiveness of the institute wide processes. The paper aims to provide guidelines to academic institutions in identifying a unified approach for building the institutional quality system and identifying best practices for internal benchmarking. It also touches on the role of internal quality assurance cells in doing so.

The author first gives a brief overview on the evolution of benchmarking which of late is more and more based on identification of good practices to be adapted by an institution. The suggested approach is built on the examples from existing industry practices, which can be adopted by institutions with minor changes and contextualisation. Then there is a typology of best practices, which can help an academic institution to discern more effectively and those that could be relevant to exchange and use mainly in internal benchmarking. Finally there is a brief description on the best practice specification (BPS) method suggested by NAAC, and also those commonly followed by the industry’s of the west, which the author feels would be of help to educational institutions to locate and specify their good practices which can be transferred to other units or departments within the framework of the institutional quality system.

The paper underlines the difficulty of academic institutions to clearly define what a “best practice” is and the lack of methods, which could help them to identify their best practices. Future research will be to develop a method of collection, compilation and representation of the best practices. It would also include in evolving a methodology for internal benchmarking among the academic institutions for effective transfer and formalization of the best practices. Overall the paper offers practical help to an academic institution to identify and characterize its best practices through its established quality system.
Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEI’s) have in recent years put forth enormous efforts for enhancing and sustaining quality of their programmes. The quality of the education /programmes offered by the HEI’s directly depends on the manner in which the institution offering the programme operates and on the way the institution translates the broader curricular concerns into its activities and processes.

Every HEI has a unique institutional ambience. This unique character is a result of the spin offs of its day to day functioning, which has evolved over years. It is this uniqueness that reflects the quality of the institution and the also expresses the sustaining concern of the HEI for continuous improvement. Finally it is through this unique ambience the HEI is recognized by the stakeholders as it meets their needs. In Indian HEI’s , despite the need to adhere to the given overall curriculum framework each institution also has to resolve its problems and pressures in ones own way. In doing so the institution develops a greater clarity of the stakeholders needs and requirements for quality and continuous improvements. To put it in other words among the several activities and processes carried out year after year each institution perceive its own distinct practices and approaches which had contributed to the overall effectiveness of the institution. Most of the times these practices also would have provided satisfaction both to the teachers and the students. In the process institutions not only gain a better insight into their functioning but also in conceptual understanding.

Experience of NAAC shows that despite the criticisms on the quality of functioning of the HEI’s in India, several of them have done commendable work. Some have carried on the routine institutional functioning in a distinct manner; some others have attempted newer breakthroughs in important functions of the institutions such as curricular aspects, teaching- learning etc. and many more have liaisoned with neighboring institutions and attempted newer vistas of functioning. All these and several other similar attempts resulted in one important aspect i.e. sustaining the functional efficiency of the institutions.

Best Practice

Most of the Quality Assurance Agencies of Higher Education have attempted to generate a data base of best practices which could help institutions in nourishing their efforts for quality improvement. In an attempt to show case the several effective practices carried out by the Indian HEI’s, NAAC is continuously working and bringing out a series of Best Practices. NAAC is also attempting to evaluate many more such practices which could be relevant pointers for others not only in recognizing their own such internal processes that have been contributing to the sustenance of quality but also to recognize the ones from other institutions form India and abroad and adopt them for quality enhancement. Inspite of all these ongoing activities it is sad to observe that except for isolated cases, there is a serious lack of awareness and training for the Higher Education sector, enabling them to effectively adopt and make the most of these best practices to improve their performance.

If we look at the international scenario, the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) has done a commendable job in suggesting guidelines for identification and application of good practices. While suggesting the
guidelines INQAAHE observed that the best practices should
- Be dynamic and revisited periodically;
- Recognize diversity and cultural and historical contexts;
- Not lead to dominance of one specific view or approach and;
- Promote quality of performance

**Benchmarking**

Benchmarking is more or less synonymous with performance excellence. Thus it may be said to be the standard of excellence, which can be used to measure/compare the actual performance of the institution (Jarrar and Zairi, 2001). In the industry it is widely used for measuring quality and continuous improvement. Benchmarking is relatively a new concept in education sector. It is considered as one of the most effective approaches resulting in performance evaluation and improvement. As benchmarking is based on best practice identification, it inculcates a spirit of competition, aids comparison, and continuous improvement. As HEI’s have similar activities, processes and practices functional benchmarking attains prominence. In Indian HE context the NAAC criteria are being used to compare institutions and develop benchmarks. By striving to meet the developed benchmarks it is expected that quality can be assured. The Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service (1996) approach to benchmarking goes beyond the comparison of data based scores and conventional performance indicators; it’s focus is on the processes by which the desired results could be achieved. The process of Benchmarking the best practices by NAAC has to larger extent helped institutions provide
- a possibility of effective practice irrespective of institutional conditions
- an assurance of attempting to do things differently
- attempts to seek solutions and for alternatives for implementation within the limited institutional resources
- an awareness of the attempts and success efforts of peers in different institutional contexts

The whole benchmarking the best practices as a process involved the following
- Comparing the practices of one institution with another
- Developing a criteria based evaluation for comparing institutional practices and identification of the best
- Using it as a change agent and
- As a tool for motivation and continuous improvement

**Benchmarking the Best Practices**

‘Best Practices’ is identifying and recognizing the performances, which will guide the benchmarking or comparative performance improvement. The process of benchmarking has passed from a “continuous and systematic process of evaluation of the products and services (Camp, 1989) to a “continuous process of identification, learning and implementation of best practices in order to obtain competitive advantages, whether internal, external or generic” (Murray etal. 1997). If we quickly browse the various initiatives in the education sector across the globe we see that this has been a recent phenomena and many initiatives are just launched and attempts are on to collect, classify and consolidate the best practices in the respective countries. The work of the QAA of
Australia, Netherlands, UK, USA and NAAC in India provide good examples. Often benchmarking is one of the key tools in the management of best practices and thus acquires prominence in the total quality management system (Rahman 2002). This approach is also being widely adopted by the Higher Education sector. It may be internal benchmarking or external benchmarking. For example when it is about comparison of performance between different institutions (compared to “best in class”) or a comparison between the various units or departments of the institution itself. A unified approach to identify processes which are generic, makes it possible to benchmark across sectoral boundaries i.e. covering the diversity of the institutional set up – the size, geographical situation, programmes offered, input levels socio economic conditions etc.

“Best Practices” Identification

There are two principal reasons for the difficulty in adapting the best practices (Bronet and Maire 2003). The first is the inability of the institution to clearly define what it really mean by a ‘best practice’ i.e. the ability of the institution to determine the type of information or knowledge, which is relevant and useful to the institution contributing to improvement of a given process or practice. As a best practice depends on particular institutions perspective, time and context, an educational institution need to answer several questions while identifying a best practice - How is a best practice different from a standard practice? Can we mean that it is nothing but a value added standard practice i.e. does the term ‘best practice’ refer to the way of carrying out an activity or a process and the manner in which this process is made more powerful? Is it relevant to the operational activities of the institution specifically the more strategic activities? So many such questions show that the expression “best practices” can lead to numerous different interpretations. What one considers a “best practice” may be contested by others. It is therefore necessary to check, if among the many organisations currently delivering “best practices” whether there is a consensus or not on what a “best practice” should include. It is here that the IQAC plays a major role. The best way of identifying a best practice is the inductive approach. The IQAC may ask the concerned units or departments to describe their best practices and the criteria used in identifying and justifying the practice as best practice. On being satisfied that the practice provides value addition to the processes and the contributes to performance of the institution by at least considerable cross section of the institutions management, faculty and students the institutions can process towards benchmarking and institution wide adaptation of the practice.

The other difficulty relates to the identification of these practices. The educational processes and the diversity within the system – the institutional goals, pedagogic requirements, social and economic contexts learner requirements staff competencies, infrastructure facilities, type of governance etc. makes the identification of best practices complex. On one side, the institution in general encounter difficulties in formulating their requirements about practices, and on the other side of the exchange. The major difficulty is institutionalizing and internalizing the best practices. The difficulty is on ways and means to identify the best from a range of already existing practices specifically, those which can produce significant results in a context of application different from their own. That means the problem lies not only in identification but also in contextualising of the best practices.

Many definitions of benchmarking show the importance of “best practice” in the process
reinforcing the idea that all “best practices” shared by a benchmarking process must necessarily refer to a process. The best practice thus indicates, a practice which is considered as a reference of good, whose success is shown on the improvement of the performance of a process.

The identification of the Best Practices is one of the critical stages in any benchmarking process. While attempting to establish a typology of Best Practices NAAC realized the necessity to propose a method, which could help institutions, to locate its Best Practices for a given process, and to determine and prioritize among these practices, those feasible to be transferred and used for internal benchmarking.

The students are considered as the most important customers of the education system and thus the student’s voice must play an essential role in the process of identifying the best practices. The whole exercise indeed ensuring that the identified Best Practices have an effective contribution in terms of student satisfaction for whom the outputs of the considered process are intended at. The approach that is proposed here is the Best Practices specifications (BPS) approach of Jean-Luc Maire et al. (2005). This approach is very much similar to the inductive approach, which NAAC is trying to work on. The BPS approach is based on principles similar to those of a quality function deployment (QFD) as this approach also works, by successive deployment of matrices, establishing a link between the student’s expectation of the process (WHAT) and the good practices used in this process (HOW). This link is built by the successive realization of four phases leading to the specification of Best Practices, specifically those having a real and demonstrated effect on the student’s expectations of the process. In the BPS model the deployment of the practice is with an emphasis on the process and not on exactly on the outcome. It is expected that the process of an educational institution must indeed be designed and must evolve so as to the expectations of the students.

**Relationship between student’s expectations and internal expectations**

The first phase of a BPS consists in establishing the relationship between student’s expectations as expressed by the students and their future employers i.e. the end users of the process and the specifications, defined in – house by the faculty and management who are responsible for implementation of the process. These specifications generally refer to requirements on output of the process, i.e. the results delivered by activities of the process. At this stage it is a question of making sure that these requirements are compatible with the voice of the users of the process. It is then a question of establishing a hierarchy between these requirements, so as to be able to prioritize the Practices as for their significant incidence on the satisfaction of the users of the process. The requirements considered as fundamental, and those which will guide the continuation of the deployment, are those which were declared as respected and whose relationship to the student’s expectations were declared as significant.

**Relationship between internal expectations and functions of process**

The second phase in BPS establishes the link between the fundamental specifications previously identified and the various functions to be assured by the process. On a principle similar to that of the preceding phase, this phase leads to the description of the main functions, i.e. the functions declared as performing well and whose interactions with the requirements defined in-house on the processes were declared as significant.
**Relationship between functions and means of process.**
The third phase describes the relationship between the fundamental functions of the process and the means required for this process. The latter are identified by looking at the effectiveness of the best practices in terms of the Assets i.e. materials, organizational supports and methods which have been put into place to guarantee that the process runs smoothly and the Aptitudes i.e. management techniques, individual or collective skills which were, developed or acquired gradually, are useful for the improvement of the process. At the intersection of these functions, are the practices which have a significant link with the student’s expectations of the process examined.

**Relationship between means and practices of process**
First of all, the last phase makes it possible to describe the practices of the institution with the operational framework in the process and/or within the framework of an exceptional or unusual operation in the process. This stage then makes it possible to identify the best of these practices. Three measurements are used for that. The range (R) of the practice reveals the extent of its effect in the institution: effect limited to the process considered or, on the contrary, effect applying to the other processes of the institution. The incidence (I) reports the importance of the effects of the implementation of the practice on the global performances of the process. Finally, facility (F) an indication overtime which separates the implementation of this practice from the observation of its first tangible results on the performance of the process. The practices considered to be best will thus be those which will maximize the value of R*I*F between practices of comparable nature. The comparison of performance compared to benchmarks must indeed lead the organisation to identify, understand and then to apply, with the requirement of adopting them, the practices which are at the origin of the values for which a significant variation is noted. And it is this ‘action’, which is not only an important integral factor for benchmarking process, but also makes its foundation. Indeed what is the point in knowing that one is ‘worse’ if one is not able to understand why the institution/department with whom one compared is better than you?

**Conclusion:**
The regular functioning within each institution tends to fall into a routine over time, irrespective of the extent of innovativeness it tries to sustain. In some institutions several meaningful activities or practices may seem to be routine ones and the institution faculty and staff may not share them with each other. Some institutions may seek to find practical solutions to some pressing needs in creative ways but feel it too small to share. For example, X teacher may try a different organizational mechanism for handling the documentation process of student performances in her class. Seemingly, it is a single teacher’s attempt at finding her way about. However having tried it, others in the institution may find it feasible and save considerable effort and so may like to adopt it. Several such small but pertinent need based practices may have been tried out in institutions and found meaningful. Sharing it with colleagues from within and other institutions would not only reinforce the institution’s efforts and promote furtherance of similar practices, but also provide motivation to other institutions to attempt to seek solutions on their own without much external support. Despite the pressing criticisms about the quality of functioning of HEI’s in India, several
have carried on meaningful and commendable work. The various attempts of these institutions in their quality journey resulted in sustaining the functional efficiency of the institutions and NAAC is attempting to collect, compile and consolidate these Best Practices. As it is commonly agreed that a Best Practice refers to institutional practice that exhibits characteristics of a quality education provision of the institution or that which contributed to the overall institutional/programme quality and benchmarking is based on identification of best practices, NAAC is Benchmarking the Best Practices and using it as a tool for motivation to change and continuous improvement. However this exercise for a system which caters to hege numbers covering large geographical area is a tedious process and may not provide with immediate results. NAAC also is encouraging the institutions to develop strong internal quality assurance structures which can help them improve the quality of the processes and activities. Also if an institution is serious in achieving excellence it has to strengthen its internal quality systems and through these work on identifying and adopting the best practices and approach benchmark these best practices. The best approach for this is the BPS method and internal benchmarking which will enable the institutions internal quality systems identify its good transferable practices but also accelerate institution wide transformation and institutionalize continuous improvement.
Abstract

Over the past several years, many higher education quality assurance organizations, including most regional and specialized accrediting associations, have begun requiring colleges and universities to use outcomes assessment to measure student learning and operational effectiveness. All too often, outcomes assessment becomes a separate organizational process with few links to the university’s strategic planning or budgeting processes.

In this paper, we present a model for strategic planning that integrates budgeting and outcomes assessment with the strategic planning process, resulting in one coherent process that includes strategic planning, budgeting, and outcomes assessment. The paper examines the challenges and frustrations commonly associated with strategic planning, budgeting, and outcomes assessment; details a process for strategic planning and continuous quality improvement, including extensive material on budgeting and outcomes assessment; examines institutional differences that impact the strategic planning process; and suggests ways to lead organizational change that improve the linkages among strategic planning, budgeting, and outcomes assessment.
Introduction

Virtually every institution of higher education (IHE) has had a budgeting process for many years. Most IHEs also have a strategic planning process. With increasing demands for accountability in education, many educational institutions now have an outcomes assessment or institutional effectiveness process. Prior to the 1990s, both institutional and specialized accrediting bodies evaluated educational quality by examining resources or inputs. In the last decade, quality evaluation has shifted toward outcomes. Most accrediting bodies now require institutions to have an outcomes assessment plan, to implement the plan, and to integrate outcomes assessment with the institution’s planning and budgeting processes.

Many institutions have budgeting, strategic planning, and outcomes assessment processes in place, but few have them well integrated. This lack of integration often causes frustrations, and may result in suboptimal performance for the institution. Integrating strategic planning, budgeting, and outcomes assessment for the institution, therefore, should contribute to greater institutional effectiveness through improved performance, morale, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

This paper presents a model for strategic planning that integrates budgeting and outcomes assessment with the strategic planning process, resulting in one coherent process. We believe than an integrated strategic management process has the potential to increase the institution’s efficiency and effectiveness; enhance cooperation, communication, collaboration, and participation in decision-making; provide clear linkages among strategic planning, budgeting, and outcomes assessment; allow for strategy-driven budgeting; and provide increased assurance of quality for stakeholders. As stated by Farmer (1998), “excellence in education does not occur accidentally—it is the result of a pursuit that requires careful planning and implementation, and it cannot grow unattended.”

The first section of the paper examines the challenges associated with strategic planning, budgeting, outcomes assessment, and their linkages are common. A study of business deans and chairs revealed challenges over strategic planning and resource allocation (Roller, Bovee, Andrews, & Walenciak, 2002). In another study of business deans and chairs at small- and medium-sized colleges and universities, their most significant frustration was insufficiency in resources (Bovee, Roller, & Andrews, 2001), including lack of money and resources, low budget levels, inadequate budget systems, and viewing the business program as a cash cow. Respondents noted that the business dean had too little input in the budget process. Many respondents were frustrated with the strategic direction of their institution or that imposed on their business program, and felt that top-level administration did not have a clear direction, resulting in unclear strategic directions being dictated to the business school (Bovee et al., 2001).
Differences in organizational level also present challenges. Departments/schools may view the competitive environment differently than the IHE’s leadership. These groups may have differing levels of information to work with. Where full information is not available, significant differences in the content of the strategic plan for the department/school and that of the organization are to be expected. Incongruence between the assumptions, mission, goals, and objectives of the department/school and the institution may exist. When a department/school has goals that are in conflict with or not synchronized with institutional goals, goal suboptimization occurs (Wheelen & Hunger, 2004). It is natural for departments/schools to establish goals and objectives that are beneficial to them, regardless of whether those goals and objectives lead to goal accomplishment for the institution.

Another challenge is when department/school strategic plans are poorly correlated with the institution’s strategic plan. At some institutions, strategic plans are prepared both for the organization and its subunits, but there is no intentional correlation among them. In others, department-level assessment results are not integrated into institutional assessment and planning, resulting in sub-optimal planning. For example, one study found a sizeable gap in regard to the linkages between outcomes assessment plans and strategic plans (Roller, Bovee, Andrews, and Walenciak, 2003). Or there may be little relationship between departmental and institutional assessments, as when institutional-level assessment data cannot be disaggregated. The data, therefore, is of little use to the department’s decision making—yet may influence decisions that will affect the department.

Another frustrating issue regarding strategic planning, outcomes assessment, and budgeting are conflicting planning, assessment, and budgeting cycles for an institution. For example, assessment results may not be available until it is too late to use them in the budget development process. This tends to create lag times between when a need is identified through the outcomes assessment process and when funds to address the need are allocated in the budget development process. Contributing to these frustrations is the fact the leadership for these processes is often provided by different individuals in different areas of the organization.

An Integrative Strategic Management Model

Given the above issues and frustrations, what many IHEs need is a process for strategic planning, outcomes assessment, and budgeting that is integrated, both within itself and among subunits of the organization. A model for such a process in shown in Figure 1.

This model, which is similar to models used in Strategic Management textbooks (e.g., Wheelen & Hunger, 2004; Grant, 2002), highlights the four major phases of the strategic management process. The first phase is that of environmental scanning, which includes both an analysis of the institution’s external environment and its internal environment. The second phase is the strategy formulation stage, the third is the strategy implementation phase, and the last is the strategy evaluation/control phase. When the process is followed and the results are put into written form, a strategic plan is developed. In the following sections, each of the four phases of the integrated strategic management model is explained.
Figure 1. An Integrative Strategic Management Model for Educational Institutions
Environmental Scanning

The starting point for strategic planning is scanning of the institution’s external environment to recognize important opportunities and threats, and scanning the institution’s internal environment to identify strengths, weaknesses, and sources or potential sources of competitive advantage. Environmental scanning should take place in each department/school and for the organization as a whole.

**External Environmental Scanning.** This includes scanning the IHE’s external environment—its sociological, technological, economic, and political environment (STEP)—and analyzing its competitive environment using a tool such as Porter’s model of forces affecting industry competition (Porter, 1988). The external scan results in a list of significant opportunities and threats facing the organization. These opportunities and threats become key inputs into the strategy formulation phase of the integrative strategic management model, particularly when examined in light of internal strengths and weaknesses.

**Internal Environmental Scanning.** The goal of internal environmental scanning is two-fold: to develop a list of the key internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization, and to assess the organization’s sources of competitive advantage. Strengths and weaknesses are determined by analyzing each of the operational units of the organization and the linkages among subunits. The results of student outcomes assessment also should be key inputs into the internal environmental scanning process. Assessment of student learning focuses on assessing the degree to which educational objectives have or have not been met, and thus identifies key strengths and weaknesses related to student learning. Student outcomes assessment will be examined in more detail in the “Strategy Evaluation and Control” section of this paper.

Determining an organization’s sources (or potential sources) of competitive advantage is another essential part of the internal environmental scanning process; one tool for doing so is a VRIO analysis (Barney, 2002), which analyzes the resources and competencies of the organization to determine which of them are sources or potential sources of competitive advantage. An understanding of the organization’s sources of competitive advantage becomes a critical input in the strategy formulation process.

Strategy Formulation

The second phase of the model is the strategy formulation phase. Strategy formulation attempts to position the organization within its competitive environment, leveraging its strengths and protecting against its weakness in light of competitive opportunities and threats in its industry, and thus builds on the results of the environmental scanning phase. In this phase, appropriate strategies to accomplish organizational goals are determined. There are several steps in this process.
**Assumptions.** The first step is to determine any assumptions that affect the strategic management process. Many of these assumptions will have been identified through the analysis performed in the environmental scanning phase of the process.

**Mission.** The second step is to determine or reaffirm the mission of the institution. According to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2003), “An institution’s mission, at both broad and special levels, serves as the context within which to assess student learning….it is important for the mission to serve as a backdrop for shaping: (1) the goals for student learning, and (2) the assessment efforts at the institution, department, and program levels.” An institution’s mission is typically developed by the faculty and administration and approved by the governing board. In contrast, the missions of an institution’s departments are typically prepared by the departments and approved by the administration. Each department’s mission should be congruent with the institution’s mission.

While many IHEs have excellent mission statements, others do not. Everything that follows in the strategic plan must be based on and be consistent with the mission of the organization, therefore it is crucial to have a well-thought-out, timely, and relevant mission statement.

**Goals.** Following the mission statement, the organization’s broad-based goals should be determined. A goal is a general statement of the aspirations of the institution or its subunits, therefore is not necessary for a goal to be specific or measurable. It is essential, however, for the goals to be consistent with and contribute to the agreed-upon mission of the organization and its departments.

Both operational goals and student learning goals are needed. Student learning goals focus specifically on factors directly related to student learning, while operational goals focus on factors not directly related to student learning, such as food service, housing, or university advancement.

**Objectives.** Each operational or student learning goal should then be represented by one or more objectives or intended outcomes. In contrast with goals, objectives must be specific and measurable.

**Strategies.** For each objective, there must be one or more strategies which explain how the objective will be reached.

**Strategy Implementation**

In the strategy implementation phase, the steps necessary to make each strategy work are examined. A strategy may require one or more new programs, policies, or procedures. These are detailed in action plans for each strategy. Included in the action plans are the steps necessary to implement the strategy, the person(s) responsible for implementation, the time schedule for implementation, and the budgetary ramifications.

Perhaps one of the most critical determinants of the successful implementation of a strategic plan is the extent to which it is linked to and supported by the budget and budgeting processes. Research demonstrates that there is room for improvement in
linking resource allocation and budgeting with strategic planning (Roller et al., 2002). Resource support for strategic planning and implementation is a challenge; one study identified insufficiency in resources as the most significant frustration of business deans/chairs (Bovee et al., 2001).

For academic budgeting to effectively support the strategic planning and execution process, it should be fully integrated into the strategic planning processes at both the unit and institutional levels. As such, an effective budgeting process:

1. Fully identifies the cost of proposed action plans;
2. Is supported by data from the planning process;
3. Is informed by clear departmental strategic priorities and rationale;
4. Is informed by relevant institutional priorities, constraints, and data; and
5. Generates results that are assessed and inform future planning efforts.

One technique for ensuring that the costs of proposed action plans are appropriately linked to the budgeting process is to include all relevant costs within the action plans associated with each objective. The action plan should include the specific steps to be taken, persons accountable for each step, the associated deadlines, and the anticipated costs. These cost estimates can then be incorporated into the budget development process. A key advantage to imbedding the budgetary implications within the strategic planning process is that it enables requests for additional funding to be supported by the results of assessment and environmental scanning processes and the resulting strategic priorities of the unit and institution. Reviewing the department/school strategic plan with the administration helps inform institutional planning, budgeting, and priority setting; allows the unit plan to be informed by relevant institutional priorities, constraints, and data; and provides a degree of administrative commitment to the plan.

**Strategy Evaluation and Control**

In the strategy evaluation and control phase of the process, the focus is on ensuring, to the degree possible, that the objectives or set forth in the strategic plan are achieved, which requires accurately assessing the extent to which the objectives are accomplished. In an academic setting, there are two major parts to strategy evaluation and control. The first is an operational assessment, which examines to what extent each of the operational objectives has been reached. The second is the assessment of student learning outcomes.

The results of the operational and student learning outcomes assessments then feed back into the environmental scanning phase of the integrated strategic management model. This highlights the fact that strategic management is an ongoing, closed-loop process, not a one-time-use plan.
Measuring Student Learning Outcomes

Student learning may be assessed using direct and indirect measures of student learning. A variety of direct and indirect measures of student learning can be used.

**Direct Measures.** Direct measures of student learning provide evidence that actual learning has taken place, such as whether a student has command of a specific subject or content area, can perform a certain task, exhibits a particular skill, demonstrates a certain quality in his or her work (e.g., creativity, analysis, synthesis, or objectivity), or holds a particular value. Commonly used direct measures include the following.

1. Comprehensive examinations in the major field of study.
2. Pre-test/post-test of knowledge.
3. Comprehensive capstone course experience.
4. Portfolio assessment within a major field of study.
5. Assessment of capstone projects, theses or dissertations.
6. Professional exams, licensure, or certification.
7. Internships (supervisor ratings of students’ performance)
8. Oral examinations, juried reviews, and term papers.

**Indirect Measures.** Indirect measures do not measure actual learning; they only imply that learning has taken place. Commonly used indirect measures include:

1. Alumni surveys.
2. Employer surveys.
3. Student satisfaction surveys.
4. Exit interviews and focus groups
5. Job placement data.
6. Student retention.
7. Student success in subsequent institutional settings.
8. Service learning.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, we have presented an integrative strategic management process for use by IHEs that integrates strategic planning, budgeting, and outcomes assessment. The process is cyclical and ongoing, requiring the development of a plan, its implementation, and then using the results to feed back into the process, resulting in a continuous quality improvement process.
We believe that an integrated strategic management process has the potential to increase the institution’s efficiency and effectiveness; enhance cooperation, communication, collaboration, and participation in decision-making across departments; provide clear linkages among strategic planning, budgeting, and outcomes assessment; allow for strategy-driven budgeting; and provide increased assurance of quality for stakeholders.\footnote{If an organization uses this approach, we should note that it would still be possible to derive budget and outcomes assessment documents from the integrative strategic plan, should a need for stand-alone documents occur.}
References


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AIM OF THIS RESEARCH
Three purposes exist for university evaluation. First is to guarantee the quality of education and research activities of the university. Second is to help improve education and research activities of the university through feedback of evaluated results. The third is to give out information about education activities of the university to the public. The third case is focused in this research. In this third case, it is important that information is usable and meaningful for the public. But rather than conducting a systematic analysis, universities only tries to report what they want to appeal and do not considering the public’s needs. In this research, we analyze the kind of information the public want to know. To analyze their needs precisely, we use the “MENTAL MODEL APPROACH” instead of the common questionnaire method. We targeted guide counselors in senior high school as subjects, who need useable evaluation information of university in real.

MENTAL MODEL APPROACH
A common way to extract needs is to conduct a questionnaire. However, doing so presumes that one knows in advance the full set of potentially relevant public beliefs and misconceptions, as well as terms in which they are intuitively phrased. Structured tests also run the risk of inadvertently communicating university’s framework and policy, providing cues in cases where respondents are unsure of the answer. If interviews are changed by the process, then their views no longer represent those of the population from which they are chosen. To minimize such problem, “MENTAL MODEL APPROACH” is used in this research.

The mental model approach method uses semi structured, open-ended interviews that focus respondent’s attention on information about universities’ evaluation, and still allow them to express their beliefs freely in their own words. Understanding guidance counselors’ current perspectives in depth is essential to create scenarios for useable information for effective career.

First step in the method is to create the basic model. It represents the beliefs and knowledge which universities want to appeal.
Second step is to create the mental model. It represents the beliefs and knowledge which the target subjects (in this research, target subjects are guide counselor in senior high school) perceived as important.

Representation for this knowledge and beliefs are in the form of an influence diagram, a form of directed graph suitable for considering information from multiple sources. In influence diagram, each node represents a variable. An arrow connects two nodes when one variable is to be depending the other. Sometimes, a cluster of variables on a common topic is combined into a node to simplify the representation.

In first and second step, interviews are conducted with very open-ended questions. The intention is to encourage respondents to reveal, in their own natural mode of expression, whatever is on their minds, as well as to establish a respectful, cooperative tone. The aim is to know what respondents feel and think, and eventually help people similar to themselves understand the issues better. Respondents are asked to expand on everything they say while the interviewer keeps track of the topics that have been addressed by using the influence additional information. Interviews are transcribed, and then coded in terms of the nodes of the influence diagram. Additional nodes are created when the interviewer encounters high-school group’s concepts.

Third step is to conduct structured questionnaires. In this step, a confirmatory questionnaire is made whose items capture the beliefs expressed in the open-ended interviews and the basic model. Conduct it to large two groups, university group and guide counselors group.

Fourth step is to analyze the gap between two groups and make scenario to be appealed to guide counselors.

Fifth step is to evaluate the scenario. Test and refine the scenario with selected subjects from the target population using one-on-one read aloud interviews, focus groups, closed-form questioners, or problem-solving tasks. In this presentation, from first to fifth step is presented.

**METHOD**

**Subjects**

Subjects were two groups; one is the staffs working at public relations field in 20 universities (University Group). The other group is the staffs working as a guidance counselor in 20 senior high schools (High-school Group). 40 subjects participated in each group.

**Interview**

For creating basic model described about University Group, an open-ended question “What information do you think the students at senior high school want and have
interest? was asked to University Group.

For creating mental model described about High-school Group, open-ended question “What kinds of information are students interested in?” and “What kinds of information are useable and meaningful for career guidance” were asked to High-school Group. Subjects can talk freely with their own words. Subjects were asked to explain when the interviewer encounters new concepts.

RESULTS

Basic Model (University Group)

From the protocol data by university’s staffs working at public relations field, basic model of important information was created. The simple basic model is presented in figure1.

From results, three significant points can be said.

First, university’s staffs perceived that to explain high quality of university there are two important factors. First topic is that students can get many kinds of certifications till graduation. Second topic is that many students can get a job to a famous big company.

Secondly, university’s staffs believe that to show high quality of education, there are two important factors. First topic is enhancement of small group session. Second topic is high quality of teachers. However they think that presenting the evidence of high quality of teachers is not so important. They only just repeated the phrase “we have high quality of teachers”.

Third point is that university’s staffs believe that senior high school’s staffs are only interested in the name of famous big companies in which students can get. So, they write down the employing company’s list to booklets.
Mental Model (High-school Group)
From the protocol data by senior high school’s counselors, a mental model of senior high schools’ counselors was created. The mental model is presented in figure 2.

When senior high schools’ counselors search university’s information, they search with three kinds of points of view, parents, students and counselors.

<Parents’ point of view>
The most important topics for parents are ranking (the difficulty of entrance exam). They believe that high ranked university’s students can get a job to a famous big company and it guarantees their kids’ living.

And also, employment is an important topic for them. Kids’ employment to a famous company satisfies their desire for getting a high social valuation.

<Students’ point of view>
The most important topic for senior high school students is a reputation of a university by alumni. Because alumni can explain their campus life from their actual experience, students can imagine their own campus life easily.

The other important topic for students is how active alumni spend their campus time.
Students observe how alumni are developing their skills and ability. Active alumni’
campus life is the evidence for high quality of a university. The number of certifications
which students can get till graduation and the rate of employment is not the important
evidence for them.

Ranking is important factor for students too. They know high ranked universities
satisfy parents. Nowadays, students really care about their parents’ belief.

*<Counselors’ point of view>*

The most important topic for senior high schools’ counselors is ranking. Ranking is
easy to show the quality of university to parents. And also, counselors believe that at
high ranked university most students are bright who can develop their own skills and
can make their campus life attractive through friendly competition.

The other important topic is about employment. Their interest is not the rate of
employment, but the alumni’s satisfaction to their jobs 5 years after graduation. So, they
are interested in how useful skills and ability for a job can be developed till graduation.

Counselors told why only few high ranked universities dominated other universities.
The reason is that because bright students have ability to figure out and express
effectively how attractive their campus life is, their campus life look more attractive
than the other campus life. Good reputation of a university leads the university to the
first choice for bright senior high school students, and bright students advertise their
university attractively more and more ……

**Gap Analysis**

Figure 3. shows overlapped topics of University Group and High-school Group.

There are few overlapped topics which mean that the gaps were identified within
University Group and High-school Group.

![Diagram](image-url)

**Figure 3. Overlapped topics**
First, University Group perceived most senior high school students are interested in the rate of employment. However counselors told that, the “results” of employment is not so important for the students. Because they know getting a job is not important but whether they can work after join with satisfaction is important, they are rather interested in the “process” of getting the job, for example, the activities in the seminar, and kind of abilities they can develop. Secondly, University Group perceived that students are interested in effective certificates they can get for graduation. However, counselors told that, for students, whether they can get certification or not is not so important. For them, the most important factor is to figure out developing abilities till graduation. Certification is one of the factors which can describe the ability easily. Thus, information about education activities should be linked to the policy of the kinds of abilities professors aim for students to develop in concrete terms.

Thirdly, University Group enhanced the quality of teachers; on the other hand, Counselors Group believes quality of students is more important than that of teachers. They believe that competition among bright students in a high ranked university make their ability elevate. On the other hand, many students in a low ranked university have low motivation to develop their skills. Counselors think that high quality of teachers is not so meaningful.

Fourth, universities’ staffs believe that explanations with booklet are an effective way to show their university’s attractive point. However, counselors perceive information by university’s staffs as an advertising slogan. They rather believe alumni’s explanations.

From the results, it can be said that the most effective way to show the high quality of education of a university is to show students and alumni. If students are satisfied with their campus life and alumni developed their skills and ability, their existence make their graduating school’s reputation better and better. Their real voice and outstanding performance is the effective university’s information.

In the process of accreditation in Japan, interviews to students and alumni, in which good and bad experiences during a campus life they are required to answer, are included. With these interviews, reviewers test a self monitoring report. Thus, because the results reflect students and alumni’s real voice, evaluation results provided in Japan can be said as effective one for people in senior high school field.
Abstract
In the Province of Ontario, implementation of quality assurance in higher education has been accelerated recently through a collaborative consultation among and between academic vice-presidents, educational developers, the Council of Ontario Universities and Ontario’s Post-Secondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB). Quality assurance regimes over the last few decades have developed a series of varying but thematically connected approaches, which have lead to highly developed, educationally tested and research-supported policies and practices. We question how the recent Ontario experience is different in approach, process or timing from elsewhere and how our collective experiences in moving to Quality Assurance as a driver of change could provide additional insight to ourselves as well as to our colleagues elsewhere.

Introduction
In the Province of Ontario, and in a manner reflected or repeated in different forms elsewhere in the country, the implementation of quality assurance in higher education has been accelerated recently through a collaborative consultation of academic vice-presidents, educational developers, the Council of Ontario Universities and Ontario’s Post-Secondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB). Building on the experience of existing quality assurance frameworks for university degrees, some initiated through national associations (USA) and others through governmental agencies or ministries (UK, Australia, New Zealand), Ontario and other Canadian partners add to a well established series of varying but thematically connected quality assurance regimes. As our quality assurance framework changes we have the advantage of comparison with highly developed educationally tested and research-supported policies and practices in other places. Perhaps as a result of, a) existing quality assurance regimes and b) tried and tested quality assurance policies and practices, in Ontario, we are seeing a rapid development of buy-in for underlying quality assurance based on the evaluation of programs that are framed by a set of learning outcomes defined at the program level.

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Outcomes and Theory of Quality Assurance (QA)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td><em>A Canadian Experience of Quality Assurance as a Driver of Change in Higher Education</em></td>
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<td>Presenters</td>
<td>Susan Silverton, Laurentian University, Neil Gold, University of Windsor, Rod Webb, York University, Patrick Deane, Queen’s University, David Leyton-Brown, Council of Ontario Universities, Roy Fischer, Council of Ontario Universities</td>
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</table>
Self-reflection
Ontario has a long history of institutional undergraduate program process review audits required by the Council of Ontario Universities, under an understanding with the provincial government, where program reviews are performed periodically by the individual universities and the process(es) audited by a selected group of experienced, mostly retired, university administrators. More recently, the ongoing reflective process has been the basis of new policy with respect to program reviews and consequently, with respect to institutional reviews and the institutional audit. The new policy places learning objectives and outcomes at the core of program planning and review. In addition, there has been a concerted effort to formalize a set of guidelines for undergraduate degree level expectations for the Province of Ontario. These guidelines along with a focus on learning objectives and outcomes will be incorporated into the program review policies of each publicly assisted university in Ontario and the degree level expectations have also been adopted by PEQAB as a standard for assessing undergraduate programs provided in Ontario by private and out-of-province institutions.

At this point, self-governance and regulation have been a motivator to move little by little towards thinking in quality assurance terms. Ontario’s publicly assisted institutions are not burdened by people ticking the box on the forms without serious self-reflection, or by articulating meaningless learning objectives where a program, while formally complying with requirements, does not intend to meet the spirit of its learning goals. Our unique experience of quality assurance as a driver of change differs by approach, process and timing from that of other jurisdictions. If timing of the change to outcomes based evaluation is critical, then the experience from other jurisdictions can benefit our future success. If the implementation process determines how quality assurance drives change, then we can all learn by comparison of our approaches to a quality assurance framework practiced by all. If there are differences in approach, some of which lead to more effective use of quality assurance as a driver of change, then we bring our insight to our colleagues by sharing our own incrementally developing experience.

Outcomes
Ontario has committed to a new institutional quality assurance review procedure based on a clear statement of degree level expectations and a program development and review process centred on learning objectives and outcomes. To meet these new commitments and to provide for the June 2008 implementation date for the bachelor’s level degree expectations we are delivering educational development workshops for Ontario universities, the first one was held in Spring 2006 with three other regional workshops in planning for Spring 2007.

Not unpredictably, the early implementation of the new quality assurance policies has also led to a sense of disquiet in some institutions, while apathy still reigns in others. A baseline survey regarding learning outcomes was conducted in October 2006 and continued use of this instrument will be one indicator of increasing knowledge and implementation of the new policies for quality assurance from the viewpoint of Canadian Academic Vice-Presidents.
Future Avenues for Ongoing Self-reflection
Two aspects of this quality assurance effort will be the subject of ongoing review and analysis during the next two years: the evolutionary convergence of the process of quality assurance that results from these bachelor’s level degree expectations with other established frameworks of quality assurance in higher education; and, notwithstanding the lack of a centralized or governmental requirement for the development of the standards, the rapidly accelerating implementation of an enhanced quality assurance framework by Ontario universities.

Appendix

Introduction

As would be expected in the diverse institutions of Ontario, examples of quality assessment as a driver of change in higher education are also varied. Fleshing out this nuanced experience, as the changes are occurring, is not dissimilar to building an airplane while you are flying it, balancing assessing effectiveness with reaching your destination. The paradigm of quality assessment adds another paradox; the necessity to be on the road to a desired destination without an established arrival time. As leaders in institutions and associations working with these changes, we will each present an example to serve as a snapshot in time, representing the Canadian experience of quality assurance as a driver of change. In the end, it is on the stage of cultural change, and in the transformation of resource constructs to learning constructs that the significance of quality assurance as a driver of change in postsecondary institutions will be seen and evaluated.

1. The University of Windsor Graduate: a theoretical construct with practical application for quality assurance as a driver of change.

Neil Gold, Provost, and Renee Wintemute, Director of the Senate Secretariat

Together with the UDLE, developed by the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents, the document “Characteristics of the University of Windsor Graduate” are the drivers of every program, setting its outcomes and having as an outcome, a beginning from which faculty members can teach and assess programs keeping the elements of these philosophical statements in mind.

The development of the "Characteristics of the University of Windsor Graduate" was seen as the first step in the development of learning outcomes for each program. It was felt that we first had to agree, as an institution, on the skills, knowledge and attributes of all graduates of the University of Windsor. In February 2003, Dr. Harry Hubball was invited to host a series of workshops on new course design and curriculum development, and to assist us in restating or more clearly defining the "Characteristics of the University of Windsor Graduate", which were initially derived from The Best of Both Worlds (BOBW) -- the University's strategic plan for the period 1999-2004. Feedback from the
workshops, along with the "characteristics" as defined in BOBW, were then forwarded to the Senate Program Development Committee. The committee hosted two working lunches to review and redefine the "Characteristics", as appropriate. Deans, associate deans, heads, directors and chairs were invited to participate. This consultation process resulted in the final version of the "characteristics" which were incorporated into the University's 2004-2009 strategic plan. (Senate approval: November 2003) Once defined, each department would be able to move ahead with establishing learning outcomes for their programs which linked to the University's overall learning outcomes.

The document, and its use, has changed teaching and learning at the University of Windsor because it acted as the catalyst for embarking on a curriculum review and redesign exercise. All departments have been asked to review their programs with a view to ensuring learning outcomes-focused curricula, linked to the "Characteristics". The entire framework of each program now includes the incorporation of teaching, learning and assessment methods that will ensure, as much as possible, that these learning outcomes are achieved.

If you were to visit the University of Windsor in five years, you would see that the document would continue to be used as a driver of change for every program, setting its outcomes, particularly as programs are revised and reviewed or new programs are introduced.

2. Engaging academic leaders in implementation of the Undergraduate Degree Level Expectations: a practical application of quality assurance as a driver of change.

Rodney Webb, Associate Vice-President, Academic, York University

The Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents, (OCAV) is providing a series of regional workshops each with two components; one directed at educational developers to use best practices and to aid faculty members in understanding and developing UDLE and another workshop for academic leaders, such as deans and associate deans, and faculty Curriculum Committee chairs.

The workshop for academic leaders provides an historical perspective on development of UDLE around the world and in Canada, especially within Ontario and presents a practical approach to assessing UDLE through curriculum mapping, as well as presenting other tools and methods. Our intention is to persuade the leaders that this process has been ongoing for some time and it is now timely for all Ontario universities to develop UDLE.

Engaging institutional academic leaders in a consideration of their fears and concerns regarding adopting UDLE is essential to move this agenda forward. Many have had grave concerns regarding UDLE or have heard of negative experiences in other countries. The workshop organizers encourage academic leaders to articulate concerns and lead a candid discussion essential to dispel myths and to assure academic leaders of the value of introducing UDLE, enhancing understanding of the value UDLE, and their utility to develop learning objectives which enhance academic program quality and the student
experience, and become a tool to build capacity for curricular development and determine learning outcomes.

One outcome of these workshops has been increased commitment and understanding by the educational developers of the value of UDLE in curricular development. Another is that the educational developers can more readily assist academic leaders in developing and assessing UDLE. Moreover, academic leaders now understand the value of UDLE in enhancing student engagement and program quality. They show greater willingness to engage meaningfully in developing program UDLE.

Additionally, the educational developers at York U have a website to aid faculty colleagues in building degree and program specific UDLE. The web site (http://degree-expectations.apps01.yorku.ca/wordpress/) is entitled: ‘Curriculum Development. Guidelines for Undergraduate Degree-Level Expectations from the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents’ and offers aid to facilitate conversion and assists in developing program-specific UDLE. There is a webpage for each of the six broad goals to be achieved. For each degree type, there are questions provided to help faculty develop and articulate desired program goals. As a further aid, samples of UDLE from around the world i.e. England, Australia, will be added. Most importantly, the web site provides advice on developing program performance indicators and means to assess which UDLE and embedded learning objectives are being met.

3. Ensuring Quality across multiple sites and through multiple media of instruction: a practical application of quality assurance as a driver of change.

Susan Silverton, Vice-President, Academic, Laurentian University

Laurentian University is located in a rural setting in the North of Ontario. By history, the institution has by necessity collaborated widely with multiple partners, both colleges and affiliated institutions. Within this shared curriculum environment, and as a product of its rural location, Laurentian University has been a leader in distance education and electronic delivery of curriculum. The implementation of UDLE, in association with other undergraduate program review policy, has created a potent driver of change. One consequence of the changing parameters for program review has been a new requirement for cyclical self-studies by each program at the parent location in Sudbury Ontario, to include the self-study materials from every other site. This requirement is not trivial in many programs, which were established more than twenty-five years ago with an identical curriculum, but which have experienced “curriculum drift” as old faculty have left and new faculty have taken over courses. In some programs, the institutional memory has forgotten that an affiliate may still be teaching a few courses in the discipline, even though the entire program has been discontinued. In essence, colleagues, teaching the same course in different institutions, leading to the same degree, may not be aware of each other.

Recently, the Philosophy department at Laurentian University, as a consequence of the cyclical review “discovered” new colleagues in their discipline at an affiliated institution
only three hours by car from Sudbury. The “discovery” was a result of an initial review of the departmental self-study carried out by the department chair and the Vice-President, Academic; a meeting that is not required but has had significant effect on ongoing implementation of a learning outcomes framework in our institution. There are two department chairs in Philosophy; the department has a Francophone component in a federated institution, co-located on our campus, and the Anglophone component is in the parent institution. The two philosophers looked in surprise at each other, and in a combined exclamation, which was anything but philosophical, expressed their immediate desire to jump into a car together and travel to meet the newly discovered colleagues, only three hours away. A more practical result, however, was achieved in the self-study: the three departments are now connected by the quality assurance framework and will be harmonising their curricular offerings in the context of the UDLE.

In contrast, a current challenge in our institution, given the multiple modes of delivery of our curriculum, is to reconstruct internal committees, charged by the Laurentian University Senate to review programs and courses given face2face and by distance education and electronic delivery, separately but equally. While the Senate Bylaws have been changed and approved to move ahead with face2face programming, the Office of the Vice-President, Academic has requested a new dialog between the Director of the Distance Education Department and the Curriculum Committee chair, aimed at harmonising program and course learning outcomes across medium of delivery. The driver is quality assurance. The expected change is improved consistency of program quality, regardless of medium of delivery, across a complex institution.

4. Caveats: Quality Assessment and Cultural Reframing

Patrick Deane, Vice-Principal, Academic, Queen’s University

Queen's University's Internal Academic Review (IAR) process is rigorous and extensive, though in some respects overwrought. All academic programs, whether situated within a single department or straddling a number of departments or faculties, must undergo full review at least every seven years. By the time the final report of the IAR Committee goes to Senate, any program will have been subjected to self-evaluation, evaluation by external reviewers, evaluation by an internal multi-disciplinary team, and commentary from the Department Head and the Dean. Historically, though, this considerable activity-involving a great number of faculty, staff, and administrators--has concentrated on an assessment of the present state of the program, focusing for the most part on resources: how they are used, what more might be needed, and of what type. While in some programs explicit attention has been paid to outcomes, it would be true to say that until recently it was not the norm for the review process to be anchored in a clear articulation of the desired learning objectives and outcomes for any given course of study. This is not to say that programs have been developed and operated without objectives, rather that these were treated as tacitly understood.

At Queen's, as at many Canadian institutions, the practice of implying rather than stating objectives and outcomes has been underpinned by a more profound cultural aversion to
stating what is perceived as the obvious: to do so would be to acknowledge that the outcomes of higher education are not ineffable or mysterious, but describable and to some extent quantifiable. This notion, particularly prevalent in the Humanities, survives to some extent still, and has been an obstacle in the implementation of degree expectations in the academic review process. The challenge has been to encourage faculty members to posit desired outcomes and then to assess their pedagogical and curricular decisions in the light of those outcomes--all of this while articulating outcomes in a manner that is not a travesty of the complexity and subtlety of the subject being studied.

5. Unifying Theme

David Leyton-Brown, Executive Director, Ontario Council on Graduate Studies

The unifying theme of our contributions relates how the Ontario universities are moving, individually and collectively, to translate learning objectives and learning outcomes, and degree level expectations, from rhetoric to actuality. This translation is affecting the curricular and educational experience of all programs, courses, faculty and students. Many jurisdictions and QA agencies express these concepts but we all fear that as institutions translate the quality assurance frameworks into reality, and exchange our intentions for actions, we may also be exchanging rhetoric for results.

What I find genuinely impressive about our recent Ontario experience is that we are not only moving to require substantive action (e.g. program approval processes requiring articulation of learning objectives; and undergraduate program reviews requiring evidence of learning outcomes; etc.), but we recognize that the quality assurance framework also requires cultural change. Ontario universities are making serious efforts to transform the academic culture of our institutions and bring these issues into the consciousness of more and more individual faculty members.
Implementation of external quality assurance processes overseas usually results in organisational change in partner institutions. The UK QAA requirements very often differ significantly from the home regulations for higher education institutions. In the case of Polish and Indian regulations the QAA requirements are almost always stricter than the QA home framework. As a result the QAA requirements driving organisational change could be seen as a negative and intrusive intervention from the UK universities.

The question and the big challenge is how to use QA as a positive supportive mechanism which promotes quality of programmes rather then ‘ticking boxes’ exercise for the sake of QAA audits. To address this issue it is absolutely essential to identify the best method of implementation of quality assurance processes in order to succeed in the organisational change for the benefit of students and staff.

The aim of this paper is to explore which approaches to quality assurance succeed as drivers of change in transnational education using examples of Indian and Polish institutions implementing the UK QA processes. The paper will argue that quality enhancement, particularly in relation to module evaluation; can be a successful way of developing and maintaining quality cultures.

**Methodology**

The outcomes of this paper are based on research conducted as part of the FDTL project: Quality in Business Education (QUBE, 2005). Data have been collected from staff from nine institutions in semi-structured interviews and from 330 students using questionnaires. Then the findings were confronted with institutions in India and Poland which offer UK validated programmes, and as a result are obliged to implement UK QAA systems.

**Module evaluation**

The main focus of the paper is to analyse one particular aspect of quality assurance: module evaluation process. The QUBE project addresses the area of business and management education that, in the recent QAA subject review, showed the most significant weaknesses and module evaluation was one of the areas where improvements were recommended.

Since 1992, when the Higher Education Funding Council and the Higher Education Quality Council were created in the UK, there has been an increasing importance placed upon obtaining students’ views of the quality of provision in HEIs. The HEQC was replaced by the Quality Assurance Agency in 1997, which continued mission to promote public confidence that quality is enhanced. The QAA subject review – Business & Management of 2001-2002 revealed that ‘quality management and enhancement was the weakest aspect and most in need of further improvement’ (QAA Report, 2002). One of the weaknesses is the module evaluation process which is particularly important in the context of the expansion of
the university sector and concerns with quality and the growing ‘consumerism’ of higher education where a significant growth, and sophistication in processes designed to collect views from students has been observed (Harvey, 2001). Student’s views are now regarded as key element in the process of effective monitoring of quality in teaching and learning.

The need for greater accountability and improvement in the quality of teaching has become a major issue in higher education in recent years (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998; Ramsden, 1991). In response to this need, both governments and universities have attempted to institute policies and practices designed to measure, encourage and reward ‘good teaching’ (Ballantyne, 2000).

**Standardised v. Diversified system of module evaluation**

Semi-structured interviews have been conducted in nine UK HE institutions to explore how the QAA requirements of module evaluation are implemented and if the process contributes to enhancement of the quality culture. Two main systems have been identified: diversified and standardised module evaluation systems.

With standardised systems, a standard questionnaire which can be applied to all modules is designed by the management team responsible for quality assurance. They collect process and analyse all the data. In diversified systems, different methods of evaluation may be used for different modules, at the discretion of the module leader or teacher. This person has ownership of the data and is generally responsible for its collection and analysis, and any action to be taken as a result of findings.

**Findings from Institutions with standardised system**

**Institution A**

In Institution A, the Teaching Committee designed one standard questionnaire for undergraduate modules and one for postgraduate modules. Staff can get a score ranging from 1 to 5 overall. Anybody with a score below 3.5 will have to talk to a line manager or a Deputy Principal to discuss the strategy to improve the scores for the next year. Then the Programme Director will follow up the subject related issues raised by students, and the Section Head will follow up the staff development needs.

“*It is appropriate to have one standard questionnaire, because our questions were designed in that way that they cross all different subjects (...) The module evaluation process is detached from the module leader. The questions are not designed by the module leader, and are not collected by the module leader.*”

**Institution B**

Institution B used one standardised questionnaire for undergraduate, one for postgraduate, and one for the MBA programme. However, development work was in progress to create one generic questionnaire for all courses, across the school. On each questionnaire the student would read that:

“*Student feedback is a vital part of the monitoring of the quality of the teaching and learning experience. Your views will contribute to the management courses and rewarding promotion of staff*”

In Institution B, the main driver for the introduction of a centrally administered standardised questionnaire was that the staff should be rewarded for a good teaching.
“You cannot be asking different questions on different modules. Questions have to be set on one set of criteria. In order to make comparison, and make judgement on the staff performance you cannot use different criteria. We want to treat individuals equally.”

The undergraduate or postgraduate administration always organises collection of feedback before students receive their results. It is not collected by the lecturers themselves.

**Institution C**
In November 2004 Institution C moved from diversity of module evaluation forms and module evaluation practices to nine standardised questions that all students answer on-line in class at the end of each unit (module). The excellent IT resources allow all students to give feedback on-line. Institution C invested in a special software that facilitates creation and processing of questionnaires very efficiently.

“It has got an instant analysis of the results, which is available for the tutors and students straight away. Standard questionnaires are better as they allow you to compare the quality of modules”

**Findings from institutions with diversified system**

**Institution D**
In Institution D a module leader decides which method is the most appropriate for collecting student feedback. This allows module leaders to collect data in a more creative way, for example focus groups, plenary discussions, posters. The majority of module leaders use questionnaires as the quickest and most reliable way to collect and process data and to have a record of a student feedback, which is required by quality assurance processes. The data is analysed by a module leader and then incorporated into the Module Evaluation Form (MEV) with recommendations for actions to be taken in order to improve the module next semester.

Many interviewees believed that different methods should be used to evaluate different modules. For example, new modules should be evaluated differently from established modules or modules where students have to use special software for business simulations should be evaluated in a different way to modules where students do not use IT.

“The style of the evaluation should follow the style of the module. If your teaching style is flexible, a questionnaire would not be appropriate. If you have very structured seminars with planned activities, and then you ask them to write feedback on flip charts, or make a poster, students would feel very uneasy about it. That is why methods should be different”

“The standardised questionnaire would lead to even more questionnaire fatigue that is why there needs to be some variety in the module evaluation.”

**Institution E**
In the past, according to University policy, every module leader had to collect feedback from students and write a report. The module feedback report would feed into the programme report, this would feed into the Faculty report, and in turn this would feed into the central university report. Because of the quantity of reporting, it was decided that the module feedback reports should be dropped because of time pressure and bureaucracy. The new university policy focused on programme level feedback.
“The School policy is that every module leader has freedom how to collect the feedback. But there is no mechanism to know if they do it and if they do something about improving the module. This is not satisfactory.”

**Institution F**

There was neither a standardised questionnaire nor a standardised process of module evaluation. Module leaders were supposed to collect feedback from students at the end of the module, but the outcomes of the feedback was not discussed within the institution. It was considered preferable to have different methods of evaluation. Some modules were small so using qualitative questions was seen as manageable and appropriate. Evaluating using qualitative questions was deemed impossible with a group of more than 70 students, so methods depended largely on the size of the module.

“It also depends on the level of module. If there is a new module, you want to have many open questions and more specific questions, because it is likely that you would like to review and make appropriate changes.”

**Costs and benefits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of the standardised system</th>
<th>Disadvantages of the standardised system</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Objectivity/credibility of feedback.</td>
<td>• The process is too remote from a module leader, who is the key stakeholder in the process. If lecturers feel less ownership of the process, it is more difficult to make change and improve quality.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Comparability across the modules.</td>
<td>• One standardised questionnaire is not appropriate for a wide variety of modules, ranging from accounting and economics to strategy and business ethics.</td>
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<td>• Lecturers do not spend time designing, collecting and processing data.</td>
<td>• Mechanistic attitude towards the process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ownership by management team increases credibility of the data.</td>
<td>• Negative impact on staff morale. Many respondents said ‘We are employed as professionals, so we should be treated as professionals’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More effective monitoring system.</td>
<td>• Student fatigue – students can become bored answering the same questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Data can be used for marketing purposes.</td>
<td>• Not possible to ask specific questions, which may be especially relevant for new material.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Data can be used as a benchmark against other institutions (in the case of an external body conducting the process).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Students feel more comfortable giving feedback to administrators then to module leaders (more anonymity)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lecturers are rewarded for ‘good teaching’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Effective system for quick identification of serious problems with modules.</td>
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The model below illustrates differences between two systems using parameters of credibility, responsiveness and effectiveness.
Credibility
Respondents raised an issue about honesty of module leaders. To what extent can the management trust module leaders, if they are the only people who collect and analyse the feedback forms? In the standardised system the credibility of data is very high. While in the system where module leaders have more autonomy and more ownership of the process there is always a possibility to ignore negative comments. On the other hand if the whole evaluation process is healthy, then students should be able to raise concerns in other way (student staff-committees, informal feedback)

Time
Universities have to face increasing pressure from big number of students in the Higher Education. The number of students on one module can sometimes reach 500 students. Collecting and analysing data from student feedback on such big modules creates a lot of extra work, usually in the critical time of assessment. Time pressure and insufficient resources make it sometime impossible to analyse the feedback and communicate the results to the students who gave that feedback. From that perspective, standardised questionnaire, collected and processes by central administration would benefit module leader.

Responsiveness
Improvement of modules is not feasible without engagement of module leaders. Therefore the more ownership of the process belongs to module leader the better chances of positive response and improvements. Majority of the respondents felt that more autonomy and more flexibility improves staff morale and will to improve the quality of teaching. On the other hand, the effective control and pressure from management team forces necessary improvements as well. The initiative to improve might be impose externally, but it does not mean that it is not effective.

Effectiveness
The overall effectiveness of the process does not depend on the particular method used. The respondents believed that there is not ‘one best way’ of organising module evaluation process. The common view was that there is a need to achieve a balance between the module leader’s autonomy and central control. Respondents would welcome more administrative support in the process of collecting feedback and processing, for example using Optical reading system, but the final analysis of the data should stay with the module leader, as he is the person who can interpret the feedback in the teaching context.

Indian and Polish case

The conclusions from research conducted in the UK HE institutions suggest that it is difficult to decide on the most effective module evaluation method as everything depends on the organisational context. This is especially important for overseas collaborations where the international context and cultural differences have to be considered. The two examples below illustrate how the UK University that adopts diversified system implements module evaluation at the partner institutions through the enhancement model rather then the quality assurance model.

Quality enhancement is closely related to different activities that promote ‘Quality culture’ within organisation. The Quality Assurance frameworks, perceived by respondents as ‘set of
rules that must be followed’, are not always integrated into the international HE organisations, as they are perceived as externally imposed rules that serve mainly audit purposes. One respondent in the interviews said:

“I am very bored with mechanistic paper-ticking boxes of quality assurance. I find it boring and I don’t find it effective. You can go to an institution where they ticked all the boxes and they still do not give students a very good learning experience. What is important is the culture of the teaching team, the culture of the institution. Here we are reflective, talking to each other how to improve things, how we could do it better the next time, reflecting on what we have changed, and keeping track on good and bad changes. Reflection is very important, but it is not about ticking boxes, its about culture of an institution.

Some people think that the quality is about check list, while I think that I can walk through the door and I know whether the quality is there or not. you can smell the quality. Quality is not mechanical it is people oriented.”

The UK University has a responsibility of QA in the partner institutions offering UK courses overseas. In this case, the UK University adopted the diversified system but decided not to impose the same system at the partner institutions. The main aim of the UK University was to achieve organisational change and improve quality by enhancing the ‘Quality culture’ using one of the following:

- Organising staff development days to promote genuine concern for ‘good teaching’ (compulsory for lecturers)
- Invest in staff development activities to meet particular needs of individual lecturers
- Introduce buddy system where poor performing lecturers could learn from their colleagues from UK
- Organise seminars on ‘teaching and learning’
- Promote research in ‘teaching and learning’
- Create a publication or forum, where pedagogic issues could be discussed
- Employ new staff with excellent reputation for ‘teaching and learning’
- Introduce more effective monitoring system of feedback collection process
- Support staff in the module evaluation process by administrative support (distribution, Optical reading) or by academic support (database with module evaluation forms, best practices)
- Create a forum (Quality review committee with student representatives) where outcomes of the module evaluation are presented and discussed (make the process more transparent)
- Reward for good teaching

In relation to the module evaluation process the Polish university decided to use centralised system where data is collected by the Quality Officer using standardised questionnaire. The difference in the approach between UK University which adopted diversified system and its Polish partner institution did not result in any problems with quality assurance. The success of this approach was mainly about accepting the overseas partner’s choice to adopt the most appropriate method in the Polish context. The quality culture was a more effective guardian of best practices in teaching and learning, rather then simple compliance with QAA requirements.

At the same time the Indian institution decided to adopt the diversified system of module evaluation using UK university QA model. It was more convenient for a relatively young institution to adopt the same system as the UK University, especially in the context of many historical and cultural links between British and Indian education systems. The successful
implementation of the module evaluation process would not be possible without enhancement of the quality culture at the same time, promoting genuine concern for teaching and learning.

Quality enhancement and promoting the ‘Quality Culture’ requires more investment, more time and more effort, and not always the result would be immediate. Introducing centralised standardised system seems to be an easiest option, but is more mechanistic. Investment in the ‘quality culture’ should generate long-tem benefits for both institutions.

Therefore the quality enhancement model proposes a solution to the approach to QA in the area of module evaluation, especially in the context of translational education.

If we are dealing with an overseas institution where we identify problems with quality of teaching and poor or no module evaluation processes it is recommended to introduce standardised questionnaire, administered centrally in order to improve the quality of modules because:

- UK validating university responsible for QA will able to identify poor lecturers
- An immediate action would be taken
- The progress will be easily monitored by the UK University
- Students would appreciate external monitoring by UK validating university
- There will be more transparency and comparability of the process

As the quality of modules improves the management team should consider transferring part of the responsibility and ownership of the module evaluation to module leaders. This could be achieved by introducing a standardised questionnaire with three questions designed by module leader to address the specific aspects of a particular module. This should encourage a module leader to greater reflection and involvement in the process.

Over time, when the UK University is generally satisfied with the process and the quality of the modules, it is recommended to give module leaders more responsibility for the quality
assurance and more ownership of the process. All respondents in interviews agreed that the more ownership of the process by the module leader, the better involvement and responsiveness. If the quality is good there should be no need of rigorous control system by the validating body.

Introduction of standardised system at overseas institutions seems to bring more immediate results and more control of quality. However, the evidence from the Indian and Polish partner institutions suggests that in the long-term, it is more appropriate to invest in quality enhancement.

In conclusion the QA frameworks should be treated more like EU Directives, where certain objectives must be achieved, but the methods and actions to achieve those objectives are left at the discretion of EU member states. On the other hand if we treat the QA requirement as the EU Regulations, where certain objectives must be achieved in the stipulated way giving EU Member States no choice in terms of the method, the successful implementation might be more difficult to achieve.

Alice Szwelnik

References to follow PPP slides will be provided shortly.

The limit of 3000 words did not allow me to present student’s views as well, however I will do it briefly during the presentation.
ABSTRACT
Looking back into the development of quality assurance schemes in various countries and in the last 15-20 years, a picture emerges indicating that systems and procedures implemented have changed significantly over the years. Although much diversity exists as to the methods, contexts, and procedures associated with individual countries, this paper investigates whether one also can identify some common traits in the development of quality assurance schemes. By applying a historical and comparative perspective with Europe as the main geographical focus, the aim of the article is to discuss the existence and importance of some common underlying factors affecting how quality assurance schemes develop.
Introduction

Quality assurance in higher education in Europe in the last twenty years went through an amazing development. From almost non-existent 25 years ago, it is today hard to find a country that has not established a national system for quality assurance, and even a separate agency for dealing with issues related to the improvement or control of the sector (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004).

In this period, there was much development in the designs and methods of quality assurance schemes. Hence, today much diversity exists in the methods used (accreditation, assessment, audit, etc), and in the rationales behind the design of various systems. Evidence from various countries suggests that there are inherent dynamics associated with the development of quality assurance schemes (Westerheijden, Stensaker & Rosa, 2007; Jeliazkova & Westerheijden, 2002).

Acknowledging the diversity as well as the prima facie parallel developments, one should be open for the possibility of underlying factors explaining this dynamic. The aim of the paper is to identify and analyse the relevance and importance of a number of such factors by using historical developments in Europe as the area covered by the study. Using available studies describing the development of quality assurance schemes in various countries, the design of the paper is; First, to identify political rationales behind the establishment of individual schemes (e.g., accountability, improvement, efficiency, effectiveness, etc); Second, identify common traits in how these schemes were implemented and the perceptions of their functioning and effects (degree of standardisation, scope, depth; stakeholder involvement, assessment outcomes and use, etc); Third, compare these characteristics between countries to identify potential patterns indicating a certain logic behind the developments and their linkages.

An outline of possible development paths of quality assurance schemes

Several ways are possible to approach an analysis of how quality assurance schemes develop. The most obvious is perhaps to focus on the methods used and link the inherent characteristics of these methods to the problem which they originally were designed to solve. However, the main problem with this approach is that labels are not always connected with central characteristics of a given method. For instance, while current quality assurance schemes in the UK are labelled audits, they have elements quite close to accreditation. Similarly, while Norway currently has a quality assurance scheme labelled accreditation, the procedures are in essence quite similar to those of an audit.

Our approach in this paper is therefore to analyse quality assurance in a broader context. Two arguments are central in this: the recognition that quality assurance schemes are a result of interactions between the political and the academic arenas, and the recognition that these interactions may have many different intentions and purposes (Frazer 1997). From this point of departure, one can, in principle, distinguish between two different perspectives on how quality assurance schemes develop over time. The first perspective assumes that means (methods) are closely linked to the problems they are intended to solve. The second assumes that there is a poor (or at best, loosely coupled) link between means and problems.
Jeliazkova & Westerheijden (2002) argued for the existence of a model closely associated with the first perspective – the phase model. The main assumption in this model is that quality assurance schemes operate in a social and political context where ‘quality problems’ appear in a hierarchical order. When fundamental ‘quality problems’ are solved, the social and political context will address the next problem in the hierarchy and trigger the next phase in the development of quality assurance. Given our knowledge of the characteristics of the institutions which quality assurance schemes are meant to scrutinise, one could outline two versions of the phase model (see also Stensaker, Westerheijden & Rosa 2007). The optimistic one emphasises progress: step-wise improvement of the quality assurance schemes, and consequently, improvement of teaching and learning. This version stresses genuine engagement of staff and students in higher education to learn and improve, and assumes a harmonic relationship between external stakeholders and those working in higher education. Its key words are trust and involvement, and a constant search for ‘the next generation’ of quality assurance. This version emphasises mutual learning capacities of governments, quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions, and how this learning process is manifested in improvement of existing schemes.

The pessimistic version emphasises the role of quality assurance processes in the struggle for power and influence over the sector (Brennan & Shah 2000). According to this version conflict characterises the relationship between external stakeholders and higher education, and as a result, the development of quality assurance schemes rather resembles an evolutionary ‘arms race’ between constantly ‘tougher’ and ‘sharper’ quality assurance schemes, and an inventive sector trying to defend, shield and buffer itself from the threatening surroundings (Stensaker, Westerheijden & Rosa 2007).

One could also find theoretical support for the perspective assuming a poor link between means and problems in the field of quality assurance. Birnbaum (2001) and Stensaker (2007) have both pointed out that quality assurance schemes could be interpreted as part of the fad or fashion market in higher education. Stensaker (2007) has recently outlined a fashion model for explaining the spread of quality assurance schemes in higher education. The main assumption behind this model is quite similar to the phase-model: quality assurance operates in a social and political context, and is a response to developments outside the sector. However, the difference is that the fashion model does not assume the existence of a well-understood and well-defined problem for quality assurance to solve, and highlights the often poor links between quality assurance schemes and their effects on teaching and learning (D’Andrea 2007, Harvey & Newton 2007). In the fashion model, quality assurance schemes are means of legitimation, and whether they actually solve quality problems is less important. The reason is that in the fashion model it is assumed that politicians and external stakeholders are accountable for their actions and that ‘shifts in what counts as received ideas in public management works through a process of fashion and persuasion, not through proofs couched in a strict deductive logic, controlled experiments, or even systematic analysis of available cases’ (Hood 1998: 172).

However, one could again outline two versions of the fashion model. The first version would emphasise that management ideas are not closely interwoven with policy but with overarching, dominant ideas about ‘good management’. These ideas change over time to demonstrate ‘modernity’, progress and efficiency (Abrahamsson 1996; Stensaker 1998). To be picked up or selected as the preferred ones, management ideas have to display such characteristics (on the ‘catwalk’) – which again would make them attractive to a sector highly dependent on such intangible concepts for accountability purposes.
The second version would emphasise that determinants of fashion are more related to the political and ideological context, and that there are certain ‘popular’ means associated with certain political and ideological ideas, and that these may change as a result of elections and changes in government. The consequence of this process is that quality assurance schemes developed as a ‘random walk’ (Stensaker, Westerheijden & Rosa 2007). ‘Random’, because quality assurance schemes are not selected for their effectiveness, but for their momentary political attractiveness.

Hence, although we are well aware that we have not developed a comprehensive typology on the development of quality assurance schemes in higher education, and acknowledging that our perspectives and models are abstract, we identify four different explanations for how quality assurance schemes develop (figure 1).
Figure 1: Central characteristics related to explanations regarding the development of quality assurance schemes in higher education.

Data and methods

Since the aim of the paper is exploratory, our methodological approach has been to analyse the development of quality assurance schemes in a two-phased study-design. First, the development of three countries is described more in detail: The Netherlands, Norway and Portugal. Second, the countries are compared although space only allows us to provide a preliminary analysis.

Since the aim of the paper is to try to identify potential patterns in the development of quality assurance independent of idiosyncratic characteristics of countries, the selection of the three initial countries is purposive: we looked for quite different cases. Hence, the factors that have influenced the selection of the three initial countries are: First, geographical diversity, as we know that especially neighbouring countries tend to ‘borrow’ policies from each other and that they develop joint characteristics as a result (‘Galton’s problem’, cf. Lieshout 1983; also: Stensaker 2000). Second, the three countries differed with respect to political culture, history, and policy styles. Third, they had very different higher education systems. While the Netherlands was a very distinct binary system with a rather sharp, almost insurmountable distinction between universities and colleges (Jeliazkova & Westerheijden 2004), Norway had a much more integrated system blurring the boundaries between the two types of institutions (Stensaker 2004), while a distinct feature in the Portuguese system was the large number of private higher education institutions (Amaral & Rosa 2004). Finally, the three countries also differed according to the time-dimension. While the Netherlands was a ‘pioneer’ in quality assurance, the other two implemented their schemes at a later stage (Schwarz & Westerheijden 2004).
Following our theoretical approach, the country descriptions are divided in two sections. First, we give a brief factual description of the developments of the national quality assurance schemes. Next, we discuss political changes influencing each system.

Historical development of quality assurance in the Netherlands, Norway and Portugal

Norway

Brief factual description of the national quality assurance-scheme’s development

In short, the Norwegian history in quality assurance can be divided in three phases:

- **1997 - 2003**: Formation phase. The establishment of a national intermediate body, national QA-schemes characterised by increased professionalisation at the national level. Main method: audit of higher education institutions.
- **2004 – present**: Diffusion phase. The establishment of a formally independent intermediate body, national QA-schemes characterised by an increased focus on quality work inside higher education institutions. Main method: Evaluation of the quality assurance schemes of the higher education institutions.

Interpretation of the schemes’ development

Traditionally, higher education in Norway was a sector with a low level of conflict between the Ministry of Education and higher education institutions (Aamodt, Kyvik & Skoie, 1991). However, the early 1990s, when national quality assessments were initially undertaken were a period of increased interest in Norwegian higher education and consequent reforms. An important background factor for these reforms was the large influx of students (Aamodt 1995). In turn, this caused concern about academic standards. However, effectiveness and efficiency were also on the agenda, manifested through amalgamations of 98 small regional colleges into 26 larger state colleges. Economy of scale triggered this reform, but other efficiency measures were implemented at the same time, such as changes in funding systems, result-oriented planning, and management by objectives. Concerning (system) effectiveness, authorities wanted to stimulate institutional specialisation in teaching and research avoiding duplication of study and research programmes. Competition was not considered as important as the development of strong academic units and institutions.

In this period, political authorities launched a five-year evaluation project. The two ambitions with this project were first, to evaluate study programmes in business administration, mathematics, engineering, sociology, etc. Second, to learn from the evaluations undertaken and to disseminate knowledge about evaluation and quality work in Norwegian higher education (Stensaker 1997). The inspiration was the Dutch evaluation scheme launched a few years earlier. However, there were very few attempts to articulate how and why these evaluations would lead to expected outcomes. Therefore, we characterise this phase a ‘catwalk’—the Dutch evaluations were seen as attractive and modern, but they were poorly linked to the complex web of policy change, addressing quality, efficiency and effectiveness issues that they were intended to support.
The second phase, 1997–2003, was characterised by much more stability in terms of reform in the sector. No major political initiative was taken to change the sector, although the problems concerning quality, efficiency and effectiveness had not been ‘solved’ in the previous phase. Perhaps as a consequence, the government created in 1997 an advisory body, the Norwegian Network Council, with quality assurance as part of its responsibility. Besides, a public commission was appointed at the end of the 1990s to make suggestions on how Norwegian higher education could be strengthened in the next decades. In 2001, the commission produced a white paper proposing comprehensive change in Norwegian higher education. The Norway Network Council launched in this period a series of institutional audits of all universities in Norway. Although it is possible to trace the audits’ inspiration to similar audits in Sweden in the 1990s, the institutional audits also resulted from extensive deliberations between the sector and the Norway Network Council. The audits were clearly intended to support increased institutional autonomy, which at the time was high on the political agenda (Stensaker 2000). Accordingly, the development of the quality assurance scheme in this period followed ‘the next generation’ model—political stability and trust combined with a quality assurance scheme closely related to the government’s aims.

The third period, 2004 to present, is characterised by implementation of the reforms resulting from the second phase. Following the 2001 white paper, Norway launched comprehensive reforms in higher education, including a new degree structure and grading system, changes in the governance of higher education institutions, a new funding scheme, and a new quality assurance scheme. The latter implied a new independent quality assurance body, NOKUT, established in 2004, and accreditation. However, contrary to many European countries, Norway opted for institutional accreditation, with increasing autonomy as institutions climb up the status hierarchy. Once achieving university status, external programme accreditation is not needed. But no institutions can apply for such institutional accreditation without sporting a recognised institutional quality assurance scheme. The latter is also evaluated by NOKUT, and since this is a pre-requisite for all accreditations, we argue that this is actually the most important procedure in the Norwegian quality assurance scheme.

The interesting twist in this development is that the establishment of the new accreditation scheme to a large degree was related to a shift of government taking place at the same time as the white paper was launched in 2001. The social-democrat government was replaced by a centre-conservative government. In implementing the reform suggested under the social-democrats, one of the few elements changed was the quality assurance scheme. The audit approach was replaced by accreditation, with as main arguments that this would secure student interests and adjust Norwegian practices to European standards (Stensaker 2004). It can be questioned whether the (mainly institutional) accreditation scheme actually benefits students, and to what extent it is an adjustment to European standards. As Schwarz & Westerheijden (2004) showed, the Norwegian quality assurance scheme is unique in Europe. Therefore, it can be argued that the quality assurance scheme followed a ‘random walk’ in this phase.

The Netherlands

Brief factual description of the national quality assurance-scheme’s development
In the Netherlands, two main phases characterised the development of quality assurance:

Interpretation of the schemes’ development
The first period followed on the relatively turbulent beginning of the 1980s, when ad hoc committees on behalf of the government had to decide how to implement budget cuts, in particular which faculties to close. Fitting the fashion of neo-liberal deregulation, the 1985 white paper ‘Higher Education: Autonomy and Quality’ heralded a new approach, with government at a distance and emphasis on self-regulation provided that quality of higher education was shown. The institutions’ umbrella bodies, VSNU and HBO-Council, gained control over the quality assessment scheme (Westerheijden 1990). Originally, government intended to have it coordinated by the semi-independent Inspectorate of Education. The institutions formulated clear goals and sought internationally for appropriate methods. University managers held a ‘beauty contest’ in which the newly-established UK approach of programme assessments (represented by John Sizer) lost against the improvement-oriented U.S. approach of programme self-evaluation and external evaluation advocated by Herb Kells (personal communication, Harry Brinkman, 2001). HBO colleges, which had just merged into four-year bachelor institutions out of small vocational schools, at first favoured an institutional approach, but when that proved too soon in the development of the institutions they also opted for programme evaluation. Following intermediate evaluations (Inspectie Hoger Onderwijs 1992; Frederiks, Westerheijden & Weusthof 1994), the methods were incrementally adapted in 1993. In sum, during this period the Dutch quality assessment scheme evolved according to the ‘next generation model’.

In 1998, the HBO-Raad had started a pilot in programme accreditation, in response to diminished trust among employers and politicians in the ‘soft’ evaluation scheme (Goedegebuure et al. 2002). But the big change came the year after. Although the 1999 Bologna Declaration did not mention accreditation, the word was buzzing all around the decision-makers at the time. When the Dutch Minister of Education returned from Bologna, the word went out almost immediately: the quality assessment scheme must follow the new fashion among the Bologna countries and change into accreditation. There were good reasons for accreditation being mentioned in the run-up to the Bologna Declaration (such as the expected power to weed out underperforming programmes, the efficiency of public information, the—naively expected—international compatibility and the concomitant usefulness for stimulating mobility). More rationalisations were found specifically for the Netherlands during further policy-making (especially international recognition), but the outcome had been clear from the beginning: accreditation had pride of place on the ‘catwalk’.

Portugal

Brief factual description of the national quality assurance-scheme’s development
In short, the Portuguese history in quality assurance can be divided in two phases:
• 1992-2006: Government at a distance phase. Umbrella organisation co-ordinates the national quality assurance scheme, above which are placed the entities that represent higher education institutions from the public university, public polytechnic and private sectors. Main method: programme evaluations.
• 2006-present: The former system has been dismantled and a new one is being designed based on an accreditation approach. Internationalisation/Europeanisation phase, in
agreement with the Bologna Process. A new national co-ordination agency is about to be established by law – Evaluation and Accreditation Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Main methods: institution and programme accreditation.

Interpretation of the schemes’ development
Portugal’s higher education system is binary, comprising public and private institutions. Several factors engendered consensus to set up a quality assessment scheme, including the passing of Autonomy Acts (for public universities in 1988, and polytechnics in 1990), the questionable quality of the fast developing private sector, and European trends (Rosa, Tavares & Amaral 2006).

Public universities regarded the evaluation scheme as a guarantee of their quality vis-à-vis the private sector. For that reason the Portuguese Council of Rectors decided to lead the implementation of a quality assessment scheme and in 1992 a seminar on evaluation was organized with participation of experts from the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom. These schemes were then comparatively analysed and the Council of Rectors decided to follow the Dutch system, mainly because of its emphasis on quality improvement, the recognition that higher education institutions should be responsible for the quality assessment scheme, and its compatibility with the University Autonomy Act (Amaral & Rosa 2004).

An experiment followed, with technical assistance of the Dutch VSNU and the University of Twente, to assess five programmes. The Portuguese University Foundation (FUP) was then created and became responsible for the quality assessment scheme for public universities. These initiatives were taken in consultation with the Ministry of Education, and in 1994 the Parliament passed the Law of Quality Evaluation. The character of the Portuguese system led to establishment of two more evaluation councils, one for the public polytechnic institutes and another for private institutions, covering the three sub-systems of evaluation. To co-ordinate these sub-systems, ensure their harmony and cohesion and to carry out the meta-evaluation of the scheme, the National Evaluation Council for Higher Education (CNAVES) was created in 1998. The scheme implemented in 1993 intended to assess the quality of higher education institutions’ programmes through self-assessment followed by external assessment, conducted by a committee of independent experts. A final report was then published.

The first assessment cycle took place between 1995 and 2000 and the second 2000-2005. The improvement perspective, which had been at the origin of the quality assurance scheme, appeared stronger in the first cycle; in the second more accountability elements were gradually introduced: a rating scale scheme was tested, scoring study programmes on fourteen fields. However, this never worked as planned, because comparisons between study programmes proved impossible due to inconsistencies amongst reports. All in all, the first phase of quality assurance in Portugal has characteristics of the ‘next generation model’ – it was developed based on trust among the actors and with the goal of genuinely solving ‘quality problems’.

The second phase is quite recent, although changes that are about to take place began earlier, with government complaining that external review reports were obscure, seldom offering a basis to decision to cancel poor quality programmes (Rosa, Tavares & Amaral 2006). In fact final reports in general were rather cryptic and carefully written, making them close to useless as a source of information for the public, and rather ineffective as instruments of improvement (Amaral & Rosa 2004). In 2003 Parliament passed a law establishing an additional ‘academic
accreditation’, adding a new type of monitoring to the existing one. This new scheme was not immediately put in place and more recently (2005), a new Ministry (from the newly elected government) asked the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) to appoint an international team to review Portuguese quality assurance practices and make recommendation for the future. The ENQA report was published in November 2006 and during the review process the government announced its decision to dismantle the former quality assurance scheme. So for the moment Portugal is on the process of developing a new quality assurance scheme.

This new phase is largely influenced by the recent developments in the European arena, in particular the Bologna Declaration, and it has been much more influenced by the government than by the institutions: trust has been replaced by a more politicised higher education system. The present government claims that the quality assurance scheme being designed must be internationally recognised, i.e. it has to be in accordance with the principles internationally accepted in this area: the new system must follow the ENQA report’s recommendations and the ENQA Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Following these sources, the government made a proposal that is at present under public discussion, to create an Evaluation and Accreditation Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, which will be responsible for establishing procedures of quality assurance in higher education, including assessment and accreditation, as well as for inclusion of Portugal in the European system of higher education quality assurance and the generic internationalisation of its universities and polytechnic institutes. It seems that Portugal engaged in a ‘random walk’ – the development of the new scheme reflects the ‘accreditation fashion’, but chosen not because of evidence that it will work better in terms of institutions’ quality improvement, but just because it looks politically attractive.

Evolving patterns and unresolved issues

While this paper is work in progress with limited empirical evidence and more comparisons with other (European) countries should be added, the three countries analysed provide some interesting patterns—and unanswered questions—regarding our theoretical model. As space is limited in this paper, and since our research is still ongoing, only two issues will be highlighted here.

First, in the three countries the quality assurance history can be divided in phases that alternate between the ‘phase model’ and the ‘fashion model’. There are several interesting issues and questions related to this pattern. Perhaps most noticeable is that the history of quality assurance clearly illustrates the political dimension of quality assurance: politics and quality are closely intertwined. Besides Brennan’s thesis that control of quality is power, the recurrent shifts may indicate that those in charge of the design and implementation of quality assurance schemes feel accountability pressures, and that the need to do something—the ‘don’t-just-stand-there-but-do-something’ syndrome—sometimes outweighs reflection and sustainable development of existing quality assurance schemes. Given the difference between the three countries in their system characteristics, history and political culture, it seems that accountability pressures perhaps have been more important until now. Whether the pattern between the rational and non-rational models are occurring also in other European countries is at the moment an unanswered question. However, if there are countries that break with the pattern, it would be most interesting to study the conditions that create more stability in the development of quality assurance schemes. Besides, this alternation between ‘rational’ (phase model) and ‘non-rational’ (fashion models) indicates that empirical knowledge on the
functioning and effectiveness of various quality assurance schemes only occasionally influence the decision-making processes: policy-making remains ‘muddling through’ (Lindblom 1959).

Second, the three quality assurance schemes over the years have evolved towards accreditation. Whether this reflects the power of the Bologna process on quality assurance developments in Europe remains a moot point. As mentioned before, the 1999 Bologna Declaration did not mention accreditation. The term ‘accreditation’ is certainly the new fashion of quality assurance in Europe, but the question is how to interpret this finding. On the one hand, the term is used to denote very different practices (Schwarz & Westerheijden 2004). On the other hand, as shown in all three cases, policy copying played a central role in the development of quality assurance schemes. Practices were copied from very few particular settings (the ‘Dutch model’ influenced both Norway and Portugal in early stages; accreditation as ‘Bologna buzzword’ impacts on all three in more recent years), which is an indication of how globalisation occurs in real life. Thus, how accreditation actually came to the fore should be more closely investigated empirically, where one should not rule out the possibility that national policy agendas may have a larger role in this picture than currently anticipated. For example, evidence from Norway indicates that the rise of accreditation in Norway had more to do with institutional autonomy and system diversity than with Bologna. In both the Netherlands and Portugal, dissatisfaction with previous evaluation schemes provided the ‘window of opportunity’—or the ‘garbage can’ (Cohen, March & Olsen 1972)—in which ‘accreditation’ appeared as the ‘solution’, or rather ‘fashion’. Still, this should not overshadow the fact that globalisation and internationalisation represent challenges for our models in that such processes influence all countries, blurring to some extent the borders between them. Again, here we have an unresolved question.

References


Quality Assurance & Accountability of QA Agencies
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Quality Assurance &amp; Accountability of QA Agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td><em>A Critical Analysis of the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice for Higher Education in Quality Assurance Agencies: The Case of the Public Agency</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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ABSTRACT

INQAAHE’s Guidelines for Good Practice by higher education quality assurance agencies need substantial revision before they can be considered adequate by national stakeholders in a given higher education system. Various revisions are discussed in this paper. But INQAAHE argues that adoption of its GGP also has international significance in that the decisions about higher education quality made by agencies which comply with the GGP can be accepted at face value universally. It is argued, however, that this conclusion cannot be accepted until the GGP are amended to address the processes whereby each agency can become comfortable with the criteria and standards which the others impose in their respective jurisdictions. The paper also maintains that, even if the GGP were technically perfect, it may cost more to implement them than was justified by the benefits. It recognizes, nevertheless, that even under such circumstances, the Guidelines may be implemented for reasons to do with difficulties in assessing the relevant costs and benefits and/or wider calculations of a political nature.
INTRODUCTION

The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education [INQAAHE] was established in 1991. It is a voluntary association a principal purpose of which is to collect and disseminate information on theory and practice in the assessment, improvement and maintenance of quality in higher education. Other goals include facilitating the international portability of skills and qualifications. Central to the achievement of these purposes, in INQAAHE’s view, is the development of credible national higher education quality assurance agencies and relationships of trust between them [Morse, 2006, pp.244, 245, 247, 248]. INQAAHE published an original set of Guidelines for Good Practice [GGP] by higher education quality assurance agencies in 2003. Revisions were approved in 2005 with a review of progress in implementing the 10 Guidelines scheduled for 2007. An eleventh guideline, which deals with the quality assurance of international trade in higher education, was subsequently added [Harvey, 2006, pp. 221-226].

According to Jean Avnet Morse, Executive Director, Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the Guidelines articulate “…standards for the quality of external quality assurance, …”[Morse, 2006, p. 244]. This is, however, an overly optimistic claim. To the miniscule extent that the Guidelines contain any standards, they are expressed at extremely high levels of generality. This makes it difficult to link them adequately to any concept of quality assurance: further definition and specification of minimum standards is required. There is, indeed, a case for suggesting that the GGP, and the discussion which accompanies them, consist essentially of a list of characteristics devoid of any measurable dimensions.

A possible inference from the available evidence concerning the history of the Guidelines’ project is that INQAAHE has found itself on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, any attempt by INQAAHE to develop a world “quality mark” for higher education regulatory bodies requires that it establish clearly defined, precise performance standards of international applicability. On the other hand, the existence of such standards can facilitate the evaluation, and international comparison, of individual agency performance, something which a significantly large number of agencies apparently wish to avoid at all costs [Morse, 2006, p.248]. In this context, it is interesting to note that the 2005 GGP were supposed to “… promote good practices, while helping to eradicate bad quality” [INQAAHE, 2005, p. 2]. In 2006 this became to “… promote good practice, while helping to eradicate the bad” [Harvey, 2006, p. 222]. Although conceptually there is probably no difference between the statements, expressing the goal in terms of eradicating “bad quality” draws possibly unwelcome attention to the need to define precise criteria and standards before judgments about “bad quality” in agency performance can be made. The change in 2006 was to a more benign, and possibly less judgmental [thus less threatening], form of words.

Compromises made under the pressures to avoid international rankings will, however, arguably mean that precise standards will only be determined at the national level [an agency’s own objectives, for example] if and when the Guidelines are applied in
particular cases. There is a significant risk then that there will be wide differences internationally in the definitions and/or the specific standards which are applied to, for example, agency “consultation with stakeholders”. Under these circumstances, what is meant by such consultation in one case may be significantly different in another[s]. How this can enhance the mutual recognition of the quality of individual agencies and their decisions is not clear. Indeed, it seems that any process of international assessment of individual agency compliance with the GGP will amount to nothing more than a check on agency compliance with their own and/or standards determined by, say, their national government.

The steps needed to minimise agency fears over the potential for rating have necessarily left no space for INQAAHE to develop a meaningful world “quality mark” for agencies since they have eliminated the development and application of minimum international standards of agency performance. Institutions of higher education thus may be forgiven for taking agency pronouncements about the importance of accountability with some fairly large grains of salt.

INQAAHE’s ambitions for its GGP extend into the realm of mutual recognition:

Creating a basis for mutual recognition between and among external quality assurance agencies can assure institutions, employers, governments and others that institutions and their degrees have been reviewed by a qualified local agency. These external constituents have difficulty in assessing the quality and reputation of institutions abroad. Accreditation by an established agency identifies which institutions have met requirements. [Morse, 2006, p. 245]

This paper questions the logic of this argument. The claim seems to be that the accreditation criteria and standards applied by a given agency to higher education, and its decisions about quality made on this basis, can be accepted at face value in all other jurisdictions if the agency concerned complies with the GGP. But there is nothing in the GGP as they currently stand which relates to the processes by which criteria and standards might be harmonised internationally in order to provide a foundation for mutual recognition of agency quality decisions.

INQAAHE is confident that “The implementation of these guidelines has the potential to improve the life chances of people young and old in all continents and regions.” [Harvey, 2006, p. 226]. Leaving aside the empirical difficulties in assessing such claims *ex post* [1], no sensible evaluation of the potential or actual worth of the [or any] Guidelines can be based, as INQAAHE attempts to do, on a consideration of the benefits alone. All of the relevant costs to all affected parties, even if these can only be partially measured and/or only in qualitative terms, have to be brought into the calculus. Only then can some judgments be made as to whether the benefits outweigh the costs and if the Guidelines are worth implementing. It is a contention of this paper that, before any consideration can be given to such matters, the Guidelines must be substantially revised. INQAAHE’s confidence is arguably premature.
The point of departure of the critique of the INQAAHE GGP offered in this paper is the literature on the political economy of economic regulation together with recent papers by Jean Morse and Guy Aelterman [Blackmur, 2007; Aelterman, 2006; Morse, 2006]. The nature and implications of some of the Guidelines are considered in Section 1 of the paper. There are, moreover, significant omissions from the Guidelines. These are discussed in Section 2. Concluding remarks follow.

SECTION 1: SOME IMPLICATIONS OF THE INQAAHE GUIDELINES FOR GOOD PRACTICE BY HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

Some of the Guidelines raise more questions than they answer. Agency objectives, and public reports, for example, must be sensitive to their “cultural context” [Harvey, 2006, pp. 222, 223]. This implies that cultures are monolithic rather than often contested. Attitudes to women, for example, differ within and across so-called cultures. To be sensitive to, say, the women’s liberation dimensions of a particular culture may offend those who embrace different values. What happens in terms of the Guidelines if one agency is sensitive to the former while an international counterpart is inclined to the latter? Does each, ceteris paribus, refuse mutual recognition on these grounds?

In common with much of the academic and the agency literature on higher education quality assurance, the Guidelines worship at the altar of “quality improvement” [see, for example: Harvey and Williams, 2006, p.218; Harvey, 2006a, pp. 222, 225; AUQA, 2005, p.7]. The idea that quality improvement in higher education is a good thing has almost axiomatic status in the literature. It does not, however, deserve such prestige. It is difficult to find a clear definition of quality improvement. Does the term mean, for example, increasing the rate of compliance with a given minimum standard; exceeding a given minimum standard by more and more; raising minimum standards; and so on? Where multiple standards are involved, does, say, exceeding one of them more and more over time while progress is static with respect to the others constitute quality improvement? And how is “continuous” quality improvement defined and operationalised?

The conventional wisdom, moreover, ignores the distinct possibility that any quality improvement may be costly [in financial and/or other terms] and, given this, as a matter of logic, the value of any quality improvement beyond some point may be less than the costs of securing it. Simple indifference curve analysis indicates that, before any institution can engage efficiently in organizational design and resource allocation, it requires information on the qualities [characteristics] and performance expected of it, its budget, and the costs associated with its activities. It is thus arguably inappropriate for higher education quality assurance agencies to include quality improvement in their objectives with respect to higher education institutions since they are not responsible for university funding, budgets and costs and thus lack the information which must necessarily underpin prescriptions regarding matters of quality improvement.
The GGP stipulate that each higher education quality assurance agency has resources adequate to the efficient and effective discharge of its mission [Harvey, 2006a, p. 224]. Implementing this requirement can have important implications for international agency relationships as well as higher level political relationships. Suppose that the agencies whose compliance with the GGP is being evaluated are public, statutory monopolies such as the New Zealand Qualifications’ Authority [NZQA] or the South African Council on Higher Education [CHE]. Suppose, further, that the evaluation body, on the basis of certain standards, decides that a particular agency’s resources are inadequate. These are presumably grounds, in terms of the INQAAHE GGP, for all other agencies to withdraw mutual recognition of this agency’s decisions. This may, however, be interpreted as government agencies, in effect, passing judgment on the budgetary decisions of a foreign, sovereign government. Governments in general may not be willing to tolerate this behavior, especially if any agency was tempted to use the GGP as a bargaining chip in its negotiations with government over funding matters. Under such circumstances, the guideline which deals with resource adequacy is likely to be a dead letter.

A provision for a system of appeals is included in the GGP. The wording of this guideline has undergone some changes since it was approved at the INQAAHE General Assembly in 2005. In 2005, the guideline required each agency to have “… an appropriate method for appeals against its decisions” [INQAAHE, 2005, p.5]. In 2006, this became “… appropriate methods and policies for appeals” [Harvey, 2006a, p.224]. The differences may simply be semantic, but, however the guideline is expressed, its implementation may add unnecessarily to the costs of a higher education quality assurance system. This is especially likely in those countries whose judicial dispute settling systems already provide avenues for mediation, arbitration and court determinations in matters of higher education. The guideline nevertheless contemplates an appeal system which need not necessarily be located outside the agency. The wisdom of this provision is debatable. Even if appeals heard internally do not involve those responsible for the original decision, other risks to impartiality could arise if those responsible for conducting the appeal are insufficiently acquainted with, say, the principles of natural justice, methods of evaluating evidence, relevant precedents and so on. And if justice must be seen to be done, this might be sufficient to disqualify the use of internal appeal processes. This is particularly important since most higher education quality assurance agencies already have law-making, policing, and adjudication powers!

The GGP also deal with the quality assurance of higher education quality assurance agencies [2]. They propose a mixture of external reviews, with due notice taken [by whom?] of their findings, and self-regulation. Each agency must have a process of “continuous quality assurance of its own activities” through self-review which includes “consideration of its own effects and value” [Harvey, 2006a, p. 225; Morse, 2006, p. 249]. This latter may be perhaps the most significant aspect of the GGP if its implications are fully understood and eventually underpin public policy in higher education regulation. Care must be taken not to read too much into INQAAHE’s broad statement, but it may, perhaps, indicate an awareness of the possibility that the costs associated with the activities of an agency may exceed the benefits in which case the agency [and/or others] will need to implement remedial action, and, failing this, to accept that it has outlived its
usefulness. A somewhat longer bow could be drawn by speculating that this guideline is signaling that the methods of cost/benefit analysis ought to be applied to all agency decision-making on an on-going basis. This would be a radical departure from much current practice whereby the identification of “problems” [such as market failure] is typically accepted as providing sufficient grounds for public intervention in higher education with little, if any, regard being paid to the costs, and, therefore, to the net impact, of such regulation [Blackmur, 2006a, p.5]. Consideration of agency effects and value, furthermore, might be best undertaken as part of external reviews on the grounds that such independent analysis makes a net contribution to credibility.

Guy Aelterman has made a comparison between various guidelines, including INQAAHE’s GGP, which relate to, amongst other things, the quality assurance of the nature and performance of higher education quality assurance agencies. He notes, in the case of external reviews, that most guidelines “… do not, …, address in detail who conducts the evaluations, the composition of the panel or whether it is an international or national review. It is striking that most codes lay down few or no explicit rules that the external reviews have to comply with. Similarly, there is a lack of clarity on the consequences of a negative assessment [of an] agency” [Aelterman, 2006, p.232]. These observations apply to the relevant INQAAHE GGP which, moreover, is silent on precisely what an external panel is supposed to review. Is it, for example, expected to review how senior executives treat other agency staff, or is its mandate restricted to matters pertaining to how the agency assures the quality of higher education? Are some, or all, of the other 10 GGP supposed to inform an external review? As far as the composition of an external review panel is concerned, the recent review of AUQA, for example, was conducted by a panel which included significant representation from other higher education quality assurance agencies which, moreover, had strong links with AUQA. Whether such arrangements are consistent with the spirit and intent of the INQAAHE GGP is a moot point.

Aelterman’s final point deserves further consideration. In terms of the consequences of a negative external assessment of an agency, INQAAHE arguably needs to nail its colours to the mast. Does such an assessment require a withdrawal of mutual recognition of, and/or various forms of interaction with, the offending agency? One of the difficulties in this regard is that any action recommended by INQAAHE may be outside the authority of most individual higher education quality assurance agencies. Governments may well have views on international mutual recognition and cooperation arrangements which are made between their respective agencies, and wider matters of international relations may influence such policy decisions in directions different to those favoured by an agency or INQAAHE.

An eleventh guideline addresses the regulation of transnational higher education [Harvey, 2006a, pp. 225-226]. It advises agencies, amongst other things, to take cognizance of guidelines on this matter which have been issued by bodies such as UNESCO and OECD. This uncritical endorsement of various sets of guidelines is a cause for concern. In the first place, there is no guarantee that they will all be mutually consistent at a technical level. Secondly, there are significantly different philosophical perspectives
which underpin public policy towards transnational higher education internationally [Stella, 2006, pp. 259-263]. Thirdly, there is incomplete international agreement on the definition of transnational higher education. Fourthly, the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines are seriously flawed and thus cannot adequately inform higher education quality assurance agency policies on international trade in higher education [Blackmur, 2006a].

The GGP might be reworded to advantage in a few places. The Guideline on Documentation seems to provide that, say, a university’s self-review ought to distinguish clearly between recommendations and requirements. Perhaps this is really meant to refer to agency documentation, but perhaps it’s both? But the notion of a university making recommendations and imposing requirements on itself seems a little strange. Examples of the sources of evidence with respect to this Guideline, moreover, include “Proof of adherence to internationally accepted guidelines and conventions”. This, however, leaves readers none the wiser since this is not an example of a source of evidence [Harvey, 2006a, pp. 223-224]. The GGP stipulate that agency documentation must state that each higher education institution, or part of it, “… will be evaluated in an equivalent way, …” [Harvey, 2006a, p. 224]. Does this mean, for example, that the national minimum standard for research output will be the same for, say, accounting department staff and staff in biology? Or that any differences in this context will be applied uniformly across the national system?

SECTION 2: WHAT IS MISSING FROM THE INQAAHE GGP?

The GGP say little, if anything, of substance about the nature of agency-government relationships. They implicitly assume that such relationships are defined by governments, typically in legislation, and that agencies simply administer this in a non-problematic fashion. Such an approach is demonstratively naïve. The very concept of “agency” implies the concept of a “principal”, but the GGP address few of the issues which are identified in the Principal/Agent literature. There are, in practice, complex interactions between governments and public agencies, some of which at least might arguably be proper subjects for INQAAHE Guidelines. Agencies, for example, have the capacity [and often a responsibility] to advise government and other public bodies. The GGP could propose a model in terms of which government, ministerial, ministry, and agency interactions might be conducted.

Many higher education quality assurance agencies are governed by a board of directors. The GGP, however, offer next to nothing by way of guidance on the principles of corporate governance which ought to be implemented in this context. Legislation may allow some space for agency discretion in at least some governance matters, and GGP relating to, say, the type and structure of board sub-committees, and the need to educate board members in the proper discharge of their responsibilities, are feasible and advisable. This latter is extremely important if, for example, board members are drawn from stakeholders. A risk under these circumstances is that at least some board members will define their role as advancing the sectional interests of the group from which they were selected [Blackmur, 2007]. Systemic interests may thus be sacrificed and the board
may become a vehicle for rent-seeking even though this was never contemplated by the enabling legislation. The implementation of appropriate GGP may mitigate these risks to an efficient degree. This is not to say that opportunism always explains “representative” behaviour by board members. Ignorance of certain corporate governance principles may be the cause, and guidelines which warn about conflicts of interest [Harvey, 2006a, p. 223] may have little meaning and impact if board members are unable to recognize the range of possible conflicts. GGP in corporate governance might therefore highlight the significance of continuing board education and, moreover, of key governance relationships such as that between the agency chief executive and the chair of the board.

In principle, the structure and membership of the board of directors of a public higher education quality assurance agency is determined by government. In the final analysis, this obtains in practice but the process of designing and populating governance structures may involve input from the agency’s existing board and its chief executive. There has been a vigorous debate in the corporate governance literature for many years over what constitutes appropriate principles which should guide the design of board structure, size and membership [a still influential argument, which employs the principles of transactions costs economics, is to be found in: Williamson, 1985, chapter 12]. GGP which embrace the conclusions of this debate may economise on agency research and advisory costs, although what constitutes “good practice” here, as elsewhere, may be controversial and disputed.

The GGP could benefit from a detailed explanation of the meaning of the principle that each agency considers “its own effects and value”. Some speculative comment has already been offered on this earlier in the paper: it is not clear whether this principle commits agencies to define and quantify the compliance costs which its activities impose on higher education institutions and elsewhere in society; the effects of their behaviour on the country’s regulatory reputation; the consequences of regulating quality for other regulatory interventions such as the financing of the higher education system; the other capital and current costs associated with the agency’s activities; the degree of esteem in which they are held by clients; and so on. A relevant GGP might be that the costs of institutional compliance with agency requirements must not exceed, say, five per cent of their budgets in each case [3]. Another may require an agency to develop liaison protocols with other higher education regulators the objective of which is to minimise systemic compliance costs. And yet another may provide for a refund of fees to clients if agency decisions which affect them are not made within an agreed time period. One way of reading the phrase “own effects and value” suggests, however, that it only refers to the benefits which may flow from the agency’s existence. If this is what those who drafted the GGP actually meant, then this displays a remarkable ignorance of contemporary Regulatory Impact Statement [RIS] theory and practice. The GGP should commit agencies to support the RIS system, and to recommend to government that it form the centerpiece of the processes of quality assurance of higher education quality assurance agencies [on RIS, see, for example: Productivity Commission, 2006, pp.154-158].

A comprehensive guideline which advocates agency adherence to the principles of efficient regulation is absent from the GGP. There are hints here and there which refer
broadly, for example, to consultation, accountability and independence, but, given that agencies are typically regulatory bodies sanctioned by the state, a specific GGP which addressed their core function in some detail would seem essential. Concepts such as cost/benefit analysis [4], risk management, prescriptive regulation and information provision are all candidates for consideration. There is a significant literature on regulatory theory and good practices which could inform the development of such a guideline [OECD, 2005a; OECD, 2005b; Blackmur, 2006b; Blackmur, 2007].

A major theme in this literature is that, to the extent that higher education quality assurance agencies are established to protect, up to a point, higher education consumers against, in particular, the deleterious effects of information asymmetries, such agencies ought to give serious consideration to the most cost effective ways of achieving this. Under certain circumstances, forms of consumer education are warranted. But this is completely ignored in the INQAAHE Guidelines. There is, in fact, an assumption in the GGP that higher education institutions [and, possibly, “the public”] are the clients of higher education quality assurance agencies, not their students [and their families and/or their employers]. From a systemic perspective, the GGP are heavily, perhaps exclusively, focused on supply side issues.

Another major theme concerns the various manifestations and consequences of the capture of a regulatory agency [see, for example: Noll, 1989; Laffont and Tirole, 1991, 1993]. Apart from the opportunistic pursuit of sectional [and/or personal] interests by some/all board members, such capture can occur in a wide variety of other forms [Noll, 1989, pp.1277-1282]. These include capture by external and/or internal interests. The principal purpose of all forms of capture is the sharing of pecuniary and/or non-pecuniary benefits [rents] which may be generated through the processes of regulation. Some agency staff, for example, may be personally opposed on ideological grounds to private provision of higher education [even if government policy favours such provision]. They may, on this account, devise criteria and minimum quality standards which discriminate against new and existing private providers in ways which are subtle and extremely costly to detect and/or to change. GGP which specifically commit an agency to act efficiently to avoid the deleterious effects of this and other forms of capture are arguably indicated. In the particular case of the existing INQAAHE Guidelines, the failure to incorporate any meaningful minimum agency performance standards creates additional spaces for possible internal capture since it is thereby more difficult [perhaps impossible] to hold staff accountable against appropriate, clearly defined and measurable expectations. Such an increased risk of capture would, however, seem to detract from INQAAHE’s goals of assisting the development of credible higher education quality assurance agencies internationally and of laying secure foundations for mutual recognition: a higher than necessary risk of capture is hardly conducive to maximising international confidence in the probity of agencies.

Higher education quality assurance agencies which are statutory monopolies, and other agencies which exercise delegated authority, possess rule-making, investigation, prosecution and penal powers. These are, of course, exercised subject to wider judicial and political processes. NZQA, for example, can decide the rules governing the structure
of various qualifications, it assesses whether these have been observed and monitors their ongoing implementation, evidence of a failure to abide by any rules can be placed before the chief executive officer or the board, and penalties, such as removing a qualification from the NQF [which has further consequences] can be imposed. In some cases, the NZQA chief executive can hear appeals against certain decisions. This is, by any standards, a significant concentration of powers in a single organ of the state. In many other regulatory contexts, especially in democratic countries, it is considered desirable to decentralize such rule-making, investigation, prosecution, penal and appellate authority. The INQAAHE GGP give inadequate attention to these matters unless the principle that “The agency evinces independent, impartial, rigorous, through, fair, and consistent decision-making” [Harvey, 2006a, p.222] can be considered sufficient to assist agencies to exercise such a formidable concentration of power.

Guy Aelterman says that the INQAAHE GGP make no reference to the “official status of the agency”. Such status “… is about being formally recognized by the competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area [EHEA] as an agency responsible for external quality assurance and … relates to the Bologna process” [Aelterman, 2006, p. 232]. Alterman’s advice to INQAAHE is, presumably, that it add a twelfth GGP which provides, in effect, that, unless an agency is recognized by the relevant “competent public authorities” in Europe, it is not displaying “good practice”. The global implications of this need to be explored. Does it mean that NZQA, for example, must obtain such recognition without which its decisions will not be recognized in EHEA? What are the principles, criteria and minimum standards in terms of which EHEA recognition is determined? Would recognition of NZQA extend to other bodies to which it has delegated certain of its higher education quality assurance responsibilities? Will such recognition be given automatically to the statutory higher education quality assurance agencies of non-EHEA countries, or will it be withheld if their policies and processes differ in significant respects from those consistent with the Bologna rules? Does each and every “competent public authority” in EHEA have to recognize such agencies, or is recognition by one of them accepted by all? How serious is the risk that “… internationally operating, renowned organisations that deliver [higher education quality assurance] work of very high quality…” [Aelterman, 2006, p.233] might not nevertheless be given such recognition, perhaps on the grounds that they may pose a competitive threat to existing national higher education regulators?

It might be argued, furthermore, that an effect, if not the intent, of this EHEA recognition process will be to ensure that it has an extra-territorial dimension. If this is the case, and if other international trade and political blocs also devise their own agency recognition processes which include extra-territorial features, the potential for inconsistencies, and the costs of managing them, may not be insignificant. Mutual recognition agreements may be so much harder to negotiate and enforce under such circumstances, and the INQAAHE GGP may not be adequate to such challenges.

In terms of the arguments advanced in this paper, the ninth GGP, which deals with the quality assurance of higher education quality assurance agencies themselves, requires significant amendment. INQAAHE presumably expects that the model which will be
used internationally to inform the processes of quality assurance of agencies will incorporate its GGP and will underpin both self-evaluation and external review. It expects, say, that such a process would, amongst other things, explore whether an agency had a Mission and related specific objectives [external judgments at national level about performance quality could be made in terms of these specific objectives].

A key issue is how can an external review be initiated. Another is who should conduct the external reviews of agencies. As regards the former, there is a range of possibilities including the agency itself, other government bodies, clients and other stakeholders. Regulations may define the frequency of reviews and the process whereby the terms of reference are decided. With respect to the selection of a reviewer[s], the criteria arguably include independence and competence. Multiple reviewers may be appropriate. Many higher education quality assurance agencies are taxpayer-funded, statutory public monopolies. Review of their performance in terms of monopoly behaviour might thus be assigned to national or international competition authorities. Adherence to the principles of efficient regulation might be tested by national finance departments or other expert bodies. The Australian Productivity Commission and the Better Regulation Task Force in the United Kingdom come to mind. Compliance with good practices in resource matters may be explored by an Auditor-General, while issues to do with, say, probity and adherence to the principles of natural justice could be investigated by legal authorities. All of the necessary skills could, of course, be drawn from the private sector. Reviews, moreover, might be undertaken by a combination of public and private sector expertise.

When all is said and done, however, about the deficiencies of the GGP as they relate to individual national agencies, they still lack the one thing which is essential for mutual recognition: they contain no principles which address the need to reconcile the criteria and standards imposed on the higher education system in one country with those imposed in others. What happens in the area of mutual recognition of agency determinations [and global skills’ portability] if, for example, the minimum standards for research output for university accounting departments in Country X are different to those in Country Y, and/or if national qualifications’ frameworks [NQF] are internationally incompatible in important respects [as they are. Blackmur, 2004]. The INQAAHE GGP, as they stand, simply cannot accommodate, from a mutual recognition perspective, a situation in which Agency A locates Qualification Q on, say, Level 7 of its NQF while Agency B locates it on, say, a lower level. This is the Achilles’ Heel of the GGP as they relate to mutual recognition of agency decisions about matters of higher education quality. Amplification of this point follows.

There are assertions [some of which may be self-serving] in public debates over higher education public policy to the effect that the transactions’ costs associated with higher education are becoming more acute as cross-border provision increases [UNESCO, 2005, p.8; Morse, 2006, pp. 244-246; a definition of the internationalization of higher education can be found in: Stella, 2006, p. 259]. There is no doubt that costs which occur on account of bounded rationality, opportunism, uncertainty and information asymmetry [Williamson, 1985, pp.29-32] may arise [and increase, or decrease] in the context of cross-border higher education provision [whether it’s worth doing anything about them is
If higher education quality assurance agencies are mandated to respond to these costs, they are potentially subject to certain information problems of their own. If, for example, the quality assurance agency in Country X is satisfied with the quality of the higher education which Country X’s providers export to Country Y, on what basis can the agency in Country Y accept this judgment? The same question arises in connection with Y’s exports to X [this is the essence of the problems which Morse claims the GGP are meant to address: Morse, 2006, pp.244-245]. One possibility is that Country Y can impose its own processes on Country X’s exports. This is, however, costly. INQAAHE suggests that these costs can be reduced [presumably without a commensurate reduction in the benefits] through the implementation of its GGP. If Country Y’s quality assurance agency knows that the agency in Country X is implementing the GGP, and vice versa, then, according to INQAAHE, it need not conduct an independent evaluation of the quality of Country X’s higher education exports. Implementation of the GGP allegedly adds the necessary dimension of credibility thereby facilitating mutual recognition of agency decisions.

The GGP, however, contain nothing which could provide assurance, for example, to Agency Y that the minimum standards applied by Agency X are appropriate and acceptable in Country Y. Morse maintains that this does not matter: “Specific standards that work in one culture may not be applicable in another, even though the quality of the higher education is comparable” [Morse, 2006, p. 245]. But the quality of Country X’s exports depends crucially on the minimum standards to which they must conform and these are essentially the standards which Agency X applies to providers under its jurisdiction. Just because Agency X complies with the current GGP affords no guarantee that its higher education standards it will be acceptable to Agency Y. In the final analysis, mutual recognition has to be based on a tolerable degree of comfort in the receiving country with the criteria and standards imposed in the supplying country. It is difficult to see how INQAAHE’s GGP can provide this.
CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that the GGP, as they currently stand, are inadequate as a model for the quality assurance of national agencies [5]. They fail, moreover, in particular, to provide a basis on which a given agency’s decisions about higher education quality can be accepted at face value internationally. Several additions and subtractions would be necessary to address the deficiencies. Assuming that the GGP are revised to accommodate their shortcomings, including by the addition of internationally uniform minimum agency performance standards, what purposes will then be served? INQAAHE believes that “The implementation of … [its] guidelines has the potential to improve the life chances of people young and old in all continents and regions”. But another set of judgments is necessary before any conclusions of this type can be drawn. Even if the GGP are perfect in all respects, the costs of implementing them may exceed the associated benefits. It is quite possible that improvements in life chances by certain means may be too dearly bought. Exploring other options may be a wiser use of relatively scarce resources.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Presumably the claim is that if agencies implement the Guidelines this will increase the agencies’ positive impact on the performance of higher education providers over and above that which would have occurred in the absence of their implementing the Guidelines, and that this, in turn, will be responsible for net additions to the life chances of people around the world. Harvey, amongst many others, is skeptical: “… the impact of external quality assurance processes are not easy to measure” [Harvey, 2006b, p. 287; see also: p. 288]. And the reasons advanced by a group of representatives of quality assurance agencies for believing that their regulatory efforts were significantly responsible for improvements in university performance over time suggest that the whole debate over such impacts is at grave risk of post hoc ergo propter hoc, and cum hoc ergo propter hoc, contamination [Harvey, 2006b, pp.288-290].

[2] The wording has changed between 2005 and 2006: “The EQA Agency has a system of continuous quality assurance of its own activities, emphasizing flexibility (in response to the changing nature of higher education) and quality improvements” [INQAAHE, 2005, p.5]. “The EQAA has a system of continuous quality assurance of its own activities, emphasizing flexibility (in response to the changing nature of higher education), the effectiveness of its operations and its contribution to quality improvement” [Harvey, 2006a, p. 225].
[3] This, of course, may be too specific for the comfort of those agencies which argue in INQAAHE meetings against “rankings” of agency performance!

[4] Agencies may regulate beyond the point at which the costs exceed the benefits, even if they are aware of this and regardless of whether they wish to or not. Governments, for example, may instruct them to act in this way; and powerful private interests may be also able to influence such agency choices.

[5] They have proven to be so in the case of the AUQA Review. This will be argued in a paper to be presented later in 2007. [For some brief points, see: Blackmur, 2006c].

REFERENCES


The Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada: Assuring quality accreditation programs

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ABSTRACT
In Canada, education is a provincial responsibility and there is no national or federal ministry of education. In response to the lack of national standards for education, professions developed accreditation systems to ensure the quality of education in universities, colleges and private educational institutions. The Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada is made up of the majority of these Canadian accreditation agencies that come together to network, share best practices and develop common tools. This paper will briefly detail AAAC’s history and impacts, its tools including a generic online accreditor training program and future strategic directions.

Canadian Context
In Canada, education is a provincial responsibility and there is no national or federal ministry of education. Each province and territory develops its own educational system and, while there are many commonalities across the 13 jurisdictions, standards and systems vary. In response to the lack of national standards for education, professions developed accreditation systems to ensure the quality of education in universities, colleges and private educational institutions such that professional regulatory bodies and associations could normalize the educational programs.
AAAC mandate, membership, mission and objectives

AAAC is the Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada. Following the May 1994 Trilateral conference that brought together higher education agencies from Canada, Mexico and the USA to discuss harmonization of standards and mobility, AAAC was established as the Canadian organization of networking and exchange between Canadian professional education accrediting organizations: AAAC founding members were medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, engineering and architecture. The Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC) was also an early member. Today AAAC membership has expanded to thirty agencies responsible for the accreditation of a wide range of post secondary professional education programs including areas of health, language training, early childhood education, teaching, forestry, agriculture, information technology, engineering, transportation and diving.

AAAC’s mission is to foster the highest quality education of professionals by pursuing excellence in standards and processes of accreditation. AAAC’s vision is to be the voice for “academic” accreditation in Canada and internationally. AAAC objectives are to provide a forum through regular face to face meetings and a knowledge network list serve for information and best practice exchange; represent the interests of professional education accreditation agencies to governments, professional bodies, educational institutions, the public and the private sector, in presentations and publications; develop benchmarks for accreditation standards, structures, processes and outcomes; promote expertise of Canadian professional education accrediting agencies within Canada and abroad; and, monitor and investigate matters of common interest related to accreditation and mobility of professionals nationally and internationally, such as mutual recognition agreements already established by one third of AAAC member agencies.

The AAAC has links with many other stakeholders in education program accreditation. Some of these links are established through associate membership in the AAAC; associate members join because of their strong interest in accreditation and some may be in early stages of developing their own accreditation programs. The AAAC also has a Mutual Recognition Agreement with the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors in the United States.

Accreditation has strong links with professional regulation. Some members of the AAAC play a dual role in being responsible also for the regulation of education program graduates; many of these organizations are members of the Canadian National Network of Associations of Regulators (www.cnnar.ca). As further example, AAAC members were consulted by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC), a Canadian government department, regarding the proposed national framework to assess foreign trained workers: in some cases, the accrediting body is the first step in the process to assess an individual’s foreign credentials. Also, through CICIC, AAAC members contributed perspectives to the “Guidelines For Quality Provision In Cross-Border Higher Education Jointly Elaborated By UNESCO And The OECD”.
In 1999, the AAAC developed and adopted *Guidelines for Good Practice of Academic Accreditation of Professional Programs* which outline the following: that the purpose of accreditation status is to maintain the quality of programs and to promote their continuing improvement through a clearly outlined, transparent, consistent, fair process that maximizes objectivity and confidentiality; that the process is administered by an autonomous organization from the educational program undergoing accreditation; that the administering accreditation agency seeks representation of all relevant education program stakeholders and has sufficient financial, human, and other resources to carry out the operations of accreditation effectively; that qualified, trained peer reviewers conduct the accreditation review and receive evidence of program quality from all program stakeholders; and, that mechanisms exist to define and monitor accreditation recognition status, its length and conditions. AAAC members must adhere to these guidelines as a condition of their membership.

**Online Training**

In 2003, members of the Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada identified a need for enhanced training for accreditation team members/program assessors. There was member consensus that a generic program should be developed, relevant to all accreditation evaluators regardless of profession or occupation. The result is an online introductory course for accreditation which covers a variety of topics such as key steps in the accreditation process, responsibilities of assessors, key elements of gathering evidence and reporting.

The course is applicable for people from many different professions (e.g. engineering, nursing, physiotherapy, education) who need to learn basic accreditation information and skills before they continue on to more specialized accreditation training in their particular field. In 2006, approximately one hundred and seventy AAAC member assessors were provided access to the AAAC Online assessor training. In future, AAAC is planning to develop an online training program to help programs prepare for their accreditation reviews. AAAC online assessor training is available to non-members for a fee.

**Best Practice Exchange**

AAAC members seek and receive member consultation on a regular basis regarding such accreditation practice information such as accreditation standard development, legal and liability issues, benchmarking, team member selection, mutual recognition agreements, recognition decisions, appeals, maintenance of status, governance, funding and international models. Responses to these consultations are compiled and are posted on the AAAC website in the members only section.
Strategic Directions for the Future

In 2004, AAAC developed a strategic plan which was revisited at the February 2007 General Meeting. Areas under development are Communications and Public Relations, Membership, On-line Training, Web site development, By-laws and mutual recognition agreements. Future direction will include strategies to profile AAAC with the public and government by enhancing the AAAC website, developing Fact Sheets that will assist parents and students to understand the role of accreditation in assuring quality education programs and making/identifying opportunities for further interactions with HRSDC and Foreign Trade and International Development.

AAAC Impacts

In May 1998, Wendy McBride, then Co-Chair of AAAC, presented at the Minister for International Trade Round Table on Education Marketing, York University, and the 6th Annual International Conference of The Center for Quality Assurance in International Education, Georgetown University Conference Center, Washington.

A long-time advocate and resource for accrediting agencies, Ms. McBride reported that the AAAC had identified the need to share best practices uniformly across the professions and their accrediting bodies and reinforced that the “purpose of accreditation is to ensure the highest quality of graduates of professional schools in order to meet the needs of the public.”

AAAC has worked tirelessly to create Canadian accreditation program consistency and connections, utilizing modest financial resources generated only through AAAC membership fees. Collectively, the AAAC members have been/are quite successful, as illustrated in the previous examples, implementing and developing initiatives that have achieved the following:

- Inter-professional training and certification for assessors;
- Optimal principles for establishing accreditation organizations, their governance, processes and polices, standards and best practices; and,
- Centralization of information regarding Canadian accreditation practice that can assist policy development to assure quality education program for multiple professional sectors: information that should be used by Canadian and international governments and other accrediting bodies.

AAAC is proud to represent the interests and promote the expertise of Canadian professional education accrediting agencies within and outside of Canada to the public, governments, professionals, educational institutions and the private sector.
INTRODUCTION:
We are grateful for the opportunity to address here a topic that is increasingly a topic of conversation and concern in the Province of Alberta, in Canada, and in other jurisdictions, we suspect, as well. That topic is the proliferation of quality assurance devices, as universities, colleges and other post-secondary institutions, along with the governments and the publics to which they are answerable, take up with increasing enthusiasm a need for and a commitment to accountability.

We intend to analyze here the extent to which overlapping jurisdictions and overlapping quality assurance mechanisms reinforce one another in a very positive and effective way and the extent to which, on the other hand, they result in duplication of effort, redundancies, and an uneconomical investment of time, expertise, and other resources. Always latent in our reflections on the regimes we describe is the balance (or is it the ‘tension’?) between institutional autonomy and institutional accountability. Are the public, governments (at both provincial and federal levels), students, employers, and other stakeholders well and truly served by a multiplicity of overlapping quality assurance regimes? Or are they well and truly confused by an embarrassment of riches?

It is probably presumptuous for us to say in the title of this paper that we our offering “the Alberta perspective.” Perhaps we should indicate here that we are offering simply one perspective from the province of Alberta and that it is a perspective informed by the work each of us has done in the field of post-secondary educational quality assurance. Marilyn Patton is the Director of the Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC), a body that was created in 2004 when a new piece of legislation, the Post-Secondary Learning Act, was proclaimed in our province. Before that, however, she was heavily involved in the process whereby private institutions were accredited to offer baccalaureate programs in Alberta, since she worked for 12 of its 20 years with the Private Colleges Accreditation Board there. And Marilyn has also been involved very recently, as Chair of the Quality Assurance working group, in a pan-Canadian initiative taken by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, whose purpose was to explore the possibility of creating a common framework for assessing new degree programs and new degree providers.

As the other half of the duo before you, I can tell you that I have been Chair of the Campus Alberta Quality Council for less than a year, but that recently, after 33 years there, I retired as Provost and Vice-President (Academic) from the University of Calgary, a research university with a full slate of undergraduate, graduate and professional programs and a student population of close to 30,000. At the University of Calgary, I was intimately involved in new program initiatives and the means by which they were improved and approved, and I introduced a rotational unit review process there (which
will be described shortly.) I was also a member of the Conference Board of Canada’s Quality Network of Universities, which, among other things, has taken study tours to England, the US, and Australia in an effort to identify best practices in the creation and enhancement of quality in post-secondary institutions.

To describe the division of labour in this paper, I will address (and raise a few questions about) institutional review processes with which I am familiar. Marilyn will then describe the work of the Campus Alberta Quality Council and the pan-Canadian framework that has been put together by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. The final two sections, on the interest shown by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada in quality assurance and on professional accreditation programs, fall to me. We can assure you that any overlaps will never be redundant and will always be mutually corroborative!

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW PROCESSES:

At the most fundamental level, quality assurance, like charity, begins at home. It begins in the home department or departments where groups of like-minded people who form disciplinary or interdisciplinary communities of inquiry and practice band together to produce proposals for new courses or new programs, or for improvements and renovations to programs of long standing. Curricular currency and adoption of new ways of delivering the curriculum rest primarily with those who profess the subjects they teach, the subjects in which they have a scholarly or professional interest.

For those outside academia, the internal approval processes used by universities are arcane. Little is known about the track that takes a proposal for a new program in geographical information systems, say, from the conceptual to the implementation stages. Many members of the public and some members of government simply do not know about the onus of proof that requires proponents of a GIS program to convince the curriculum committee and then, in succession, the full geography department, the faculty’s curriculum committee, the Council of the Faculty of Social Sciences, the university-level curriculum committee or academic program committee, and finally the Senate (or the General Faculties Council as it is called in Alberta’s universities) that GIS is a worthy addition to an institution’s roster of programs. At each stage of this peer-review process, questions are asked (often prescribed by checklists, guidelines or templates) about the need for such a program, locally, regionally and nationally; the resources required (e.g., the numbers and credentials of the academic and technical staff, or extra space, facilities, equipment and library holdings to be acquired); anticipated enrolments; the structure of the curriculum; expected learning outcomes; other units consulted; and external expertise contributed, either through advisory committees or in other ways. Even within universities, the habits of collegial self-governance are so deeply rooted and so much taken for granted that very few within would refer to the process by which a new program is approved as a measure of accountability. As a general rule, the universities we know do not collect data on the number or kind of program improvements made in the course of getting a proposal approved, nor do they
keep data on program proposals turned back internally and the reasons for their being rejected.

While we think that universities and other degree-granting institutions need to do more to publicize the rigour of intramural vetting as a form of quality assurance and accountability, there are two obvious flaws to the system as described. First, communities of inquiry are not necessarily immune to self-interest and even conflict of interest, and more than one group of academic enthusiasts has been justifiably suspected of gilding the lily with exaggeration and self-promotion. We know of programs at the University of Calgary that were introduced without funding for graduate students on the grounds that graduate students would be self-funding. Leaders of those same programs were back seeking funding only a few years later with the argument that the university should never have approved a program, absent secure funding for its graduate students. Second, to describe as a peer-review system the concentric circles of academic decision-making, as a proposal moves upward through the hoops of department, Faculty and university bodies, is perhaps specious. Why? Because at each level, the expertise brought to bear is less and less knowledgeable about the specifics of the proposal brought forward. So-called peers are therefore less and less capable of asking probing and discerning questions, and more and more inclined, therefore, to defer unduly to the locus of “real” expertise found at the level below it. Deference is undoubtedly an academic virtue, but undue deference is not.

We offer one other comment about the intramural system of program approvals, a comment that may be applicable only in Alberta. The final approval for new programs and almost always the source of funds for new programs or expansion of existing programs is the provincial government, which until recently has laid emphasis not on quality but rather on demand. The Access Fund in Alberta (now called the Enrolment Planning Envelope) was demand-driven. To qualify for funding from this envelope, which has been responsible for almost all of the incremental places opened to students in the last decade, a university or college had to demonstrate both student demand and labour-market demand. Until very recently, then, the Alberta government seemed to some (and this was probably an unwarranted assumption) to be more interested in quantitative than qualitative considerations when supplying funds for academic programs. Because the end-game seemed to take that form, we fear that some Alberta institutions, particularly in an era when they were reducing budgets, squeezed as they were by regulated tuition fee increases and diminished operating grants, made their initial moves with the final moves in mind.

A second major form of intramural quality assurance has to do with the periodic reviews of programs and/or the units that deliver them. External peer-review, conducted by disciplinary experts, is a hallmark of such reviews, which are common in most Canadian universities. In Ontario, centrally administered undergraduate program and graduate program reviews have been visible on the academic landscape for a long time. In Alberta, such reviews have been established by individual institutions, exercising their own autonomy and using their own notions of quality and standards.
When setting up a regular system of unit reviews at the University of Calgary, I (i.e., Ronald Bond) insisted that there be one integrated system of reviews that would rotate throughout the University and would consider simultaneously, unit by unit:

a) the quality of undergraduate programs;
b) the quality of graduate programs;
c) the strength of research programs;
d) the quality of the faculty and support staff needed to sustain those programs;
e) the quality of the infrastructure supporting those programs.

The procedures developed there are overseen by a small, select university committee, chaired by the Provost and consisting of a half-dozen highly credible scholars, teachers and administrators representative of the range of programming at the university.  The Vice-President (Research) and the Dean of Graduate Studies are both members, as are a number of chair holders.  The enterprise is assisted by the Office of Institutional Analysis, which supplies data for each unit under review in order to ensure some degree of uniformity, consistency and comparability among diverse units that in many respects differ radically from one another.

Like most such review processes, the University of Calgary’s requires a self-study, the use of external reviewers of national and international stature who are selected by the arm’s-length committee mentioned above, a two-day site visit by the reviewing team, the filing of a report from that team, a response to that report by the head of the unit under scrutiny, the preparation of a proposed action plan by the unit, its head and the Dean (a plan carefully scrutinized by the unit review steering committee at the university level), and finally a feedback loop that takes the results of the review back to the University Planning Committee, which can make recommendations about resource allocation as a result of the review.  The dominant expectation, however, is that if action needs to be taken as a consequence of the external reviewers’ report or if resources need to be reallocated, the unit itself is primarily responsible.  In other words, quality assurance begins (and ends) at home.

The process of internal unit reviews here described for the University of Calgary (see further http://www.grad.ucalgary.ca/UnitReviews.aspx) resembles very closely the process Marilyn Patton will describe for the Campus Alberta Quality Council.  But it is open to criticism on at least two counts.  First, it does not work with published “standards” or benchmarks, but instead relies on the insight of the reviewers selected and the oversight of a senior academic committee to recognize quality or the lack thereof.  Second, the plan was instituted with the idea that the external reviewers’ reports would be more penetrating and more candid if they were written confidentially.  So for the time being, at least, the University of Calgary does not publish the reviewers’ reports, even though the majority of them have been very complimentary about the programs reviewed.

Some key questions about these reviews and similar ones commissioned by the other three universities in Alberta (Athabasca University, the University of Lethbridge, and the University of Alberta) is whether the results should be regarded as internal to autonomous Board-governed institutions.  Should the results be shared with and used by
government through its Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology? Should the results be shared for information with the Campus Alberta Quality Council, which has a monitoring role within Campus Alberta, a name given by a former Minister to the entire system of post-secondary education in the province? Should Alberta’s colleges and technical institutes, which have, as Michael Skolnik has observed, like colleges and technical institutes elsewhere, traditions of collegial decision-making that are less fully evolved than they are in universities, be encouraged or required to develop similar procedures for self-appraisal and self-monitoring? Would the very raising of any of these questions be taken as an affront to institutional independence and autonomy?

ANOTHER LAYER--THE CAMPUS ALBERTA QUALITY COUNCIL:

As mentioned earlier, the Campus Alberta Quality Council was established in 2004 under new legislation, the Post-secondary Learning Act. Unlike many other jurisdictions in Canada where each institution has its own Act, in Alberta, the Post-secondary Learning Act brings most aspects of higher education under one piece of legislation. In order to increase access to degree programs, the Alberta government created a mechanism to require new degree providers to undergo rigorous review to ensure the degrees they might offer would be of similar high quality to those already being offered by the universities in the province. It created the Campus Alberta Quality Council, an arms-length agency, to conduct those reviews and make recommendations to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

What is the Campus Alberta Quality Council? It is an 11 member body, primarily comprised of academics with extensive experience in higher education. A number of the members, such as our current chair, Ron Bond, are former Provosts or associate Vice Presidents Academic of degree-granting institutions. Two of Council’s members are from outside Alberta. This expert committee is supported by a small Secretariat of which I am the Director. I think that, because it is recognized as a committee of experts rather than political appointees, it has—or should have—more credibility.

I should also mention that, in Alberta, all degree programs must be approved by the Minister, whether they are offered by public universities, or private and public colleges and technical institutes, and whether the provider is resident in the province or has its home in another part of Canada or another country. Excluded from this requirement are divinity degrees that prepare graduates for work in a religious group. Also, until 2004, only the public universities and 8 private institutions, as well as a limited number of non-

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1 The “Campus Alberta” system spans 4 universities, 2 technical institutes, 21 colleges, including 7 private not-for-profit colleges, 1 for-profit private institution, and over 140 private institutions offering vocational and apprenticeship programs, or functioning as community learning councils. Work still needs to be done to define the mandates, roles and responsibilities of these entities within a coherent “system.”

resident institutions, were approved to offer degree programs. Until then, public colleges and technical institutions had been restricted to offering applied degrees in areas that would not duplicate those offered by universities. The private institutions had been authorized by the government to offer baccalaureate degrees only, upon review and recommendation of the Private Colleges Accreditation Board.

The new Approval of Programs of Study Regulation that accompanies the *Post-secondary Learning Act* outlines the approval process for degree programs. When a proposal to offer a degree program is submitted to the Minister by an institution, it first undergoes a system coordination review by the Ministry. This review determines whether the proposed program fits within the approved mandate of the institution, whether there is a need and demand for the program, and if the program will be an appropriate fit within the other programs of the institution and the post-secondary system as a whole. It is only after success in this first review, that the proposal is referred to the Campus Alberta Quality Council.

For an institution seeking to offer its first degree, or first degree at a new level (a first doctoral program, for example), the Quality Council begins by initiating an organizational evaluation to determine if the institution is capable of implementing and sustaining the degree program. To support the review, the applicant institution submits a self-study to provide evidence of its academic and strategic planning, governance, physical, human and financial resources, and academic policies, etc., as well as its analysis of any shortfalls and plans to rectify them. The self-study becomes the prime source of information for the Council and its team of external evaluators. The team visits the institution and then, using Council’s threshold organizational standards, prepares a report for Council. Both that report and the institution’s response to it are then reviewed by Council. If the results are positive, the application is moved to the program evaluation stage of the review and a group of subject area experts from Alberta and beyond are engaged to review the program proposal, visit the institution, and write a report to Council. This time the team uses Council’s program assessment standards. It is at that point that the Council may make its recommendation to the Minister. Council’s threshold organizational and program assessment standards and its expectations of evaluators are all published on Council’s website at [www.caqc.gov.ab.ca/](http://www.caqc.gov.ab.ca/).

It should be noted that decisions on whether the proposed degree program is appropriate for the system, or whether another degree in a particular discipline is needed, as well as the level of funding the new program will receive are not decisions made by Council. The latter question is particularly complex because funding can, indeed, have an impact on quality. Although all positive recommendations to the Minister from Council contain the caveat that the program be approved subject to being adequately resourced, negotiation of the level of funding is between the Ministry and the institution.

Not all programs have to go through this full review process. In recognition of the systems of internal program approval and periodic review mentioned earlier in this paper, the Quality Council has established expedited review processes for mature institutions. In some cases an organizational evaluation is not needed, and sometimes Council does
not need to hire its own team of external program reviewers. Over the past year, Council, the Alberta Universities Association and Ministry officials responsible for the system coordination review have developed templates and processes that reflect the level of information and review appropriate for specific types of program proposals. This pilot project was developed using the underlining principle that the extent of the review by the Ministry and by Council, and the amount of information required for approval should reflect the nature and extent of changes being proposed. For example, a proposal to add a new interdisciplinary major to an existing approved program where no new courses and faculty are needed is treated more expeditiously than a proposal to add a new degree program in a new discipline that involves new program structures and significant new faculty and courses. A formal review of this pilot project is planned after the first year of operation.

Once a program is approved, it is subject to monitoring by Council. This can involve annual and/or periodic reporting. As well, a new provider and its degree programs will undergo a comprehensive evaluation after five years of offering its first degree program. The institution is given one year to prepare a comprehensive self-study at which time Council establishes a team of experts to examine the results, visit the institution and prepare a report and recommendation. The comprehensive evaluation is a combined institutional and program assessment. As much of the assessment during the initial review before the program is approved is based on the institution’s plans, the comprehensive evaluation provides an assessment of whether the institution has followed through with the commitments it made and whether the institution continues to meet the Council’s standards for a degree-granting organization offering quality degree programs. As well, the evaluation team is expected to provide an assessment of the appropriateness of the institution’s systematic, periodic assessment processes for external program reviews. Council has the authority to recommend that approval to offer a program be rescinded, if it is dissatisfied with the results of the comprehensive evaluation.

That, in a nutshell, is what Alberta’s Campus Alberta Quality Council does. As you can see, Council uses many of the mechanisms such as self-study and peer evaluation that are common to other quality assurance or accreditation bodies elsewhere.
Council operates under a set of key principles that include the following:

a) using standards that are appropriate to the program level and are comparable to national and international standards,
b) having respect for the foundational role of academic freedom,
c) using peer evaluation and stakeholder participation as essential components of its reviews,
d) having processes that are equitable, open and transparent, and expeditious.

As a member of INQAAHE, it is also committed to the quality assurance review of its own activities and to the sharing of best practices with other jurisdictions. And that leads us to the next part of our paper, the pan-Canadian initiative undertaken under the auspices of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.

PAN-CANADIAN WORK ON QUALITY ASSURANCE OF DEGREE EDUCATION

As a way of providing context for our guests to Canada, under the Canadian constitution, let us remind you that each of the governments of the 10 provinces in Canada has exclusive responsibility for education. Therefore, there is no federal department of education and that level of government provides only indirect support to post-secondary education. Consequently, each province has created its own education system. In some provinces, essentially only public universities are allowed to offer degree programs while in other provinces, there is a greater variety of degree-granting institutions including public and private colleges and technical institutes, and out-of-province institutions. With such a decentralized system of post-secondary education, pan-Canadian cooperation is achieved through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC).

The landscape of degree-providers has undergone an evolution over the past twenty years. In Alberta, the changes began in 1984 when, on the recommendation of the Private Colleges Accreditation Board, private, non-profit institutions were allowed to offer undergraduate degrees. More recently, the Post-secondary Learning Act has enabled public colleges and technical institutes to offer degree programs traditionally provided by public universities. Similar developments have been happening in other provinces as a result of their efforts to increase access. These changes, coupled with developments in other parts of the world, such as the Bologna Process and the heightened

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3 The role of the federal government will be discussed briefly later in this paper.

4 The Council of the Federation, consisting of the 10 provinces and the three territories in Canada, was formed in 2003 with an understanding that “under the Constitution, Canada’s two orders of government are of equal status, neither subordinate to the other, sovereign within their own areas of jurisdiction” but also with a determination that the two orders of government acknowledge each other as partners. Post-secondary education, along with health care, and fiscal imbalances, was a key priority, and in July, 2006, the Council released a statement on Post Secondary Education entitled “Competing for Tomorrow: A Strategy for PSE and Skills Training in Canada.” That document asserts that the “Premiers agree that Canadian post-secondary education institutions and apprenticeship qualifications must be among the best in the world. Premiers also agree that each province and territory will undertake methods for measuring its success in enhancing quality.
concerns about diploma mills and accreditation mills, led the ministers responsible for post-secondary education in Canada to see the increasing importance of degree recognition for the new degree programs and new degree providers. Canada’s institutions are recognized as offering quality programs and that reputation must be preserved.

The working group struck by CMEC to explore the issue, agreed that a first step would be to compile threshold assessment standards and processes that are used, in common, by the arms-length quality assessment bodies in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario. Subsequently, each province or territory administered a consultation on the draft standards and processes with their key stakeholders. The results of the consultations formed the basis of a Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance of Degree Education in Canada. The Statement, which has been endorsed by all provinces and territories in Canada, contains a Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework, as well as organizational and program assessment standards and processes. The Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework describes the three levels of degree credentials awarded in Canada (bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees), and the expectations of graduates of each credential. The complete Ministerial Statement can be found on the post-secondary quality assurance page of CMEC’s website at http://www.cmec.ca/postsec/qa/indexe.htm.

As noted in that document, the Ministerial Statement is intended:

a) to provide assurance to the public, students, employers and post-secondary institutions at home and abroad that the new programs and new institutions offering them meet appropriate standards and that performance against the standards will be assessed by appropriate means.

b) to provide a context for identifying how degree credentials compare in level and standard to those in other jurisdictions in Canada and beyond.

c) to improve student access to further study at the post-secondary level by establishing a degree-level standards context in which policies on transfer of credits and credential recognition may be developed.

The latter purpose relates to the desire to foster consideration of admission to further studies of graduates from non-traditional institutions. We hoped to encourage admission to second-degree programs based on academic standards and the quality of the individual student, rather than on whether an institution is a member of an organization such as the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

Given that education is a provincial or territorial responsibility and that the primary responsibility for quality assurance rests with the autonomous post-secondary institutions, it is up to each jurisdiction to use the Statement as is appropriate to its post-secondary education system. As the Ministerial Statement indicates, the ministers expect that the institutions and governments will “develop, enhance and maintain quality assurance standards and procedures that reflect best practices in quality assurance” and, where
governments have a role in deciding new degree programs and new degree providers, they will ensure appropriate forms of quality assurance are in place.\footnote{Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, “Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance of Degree Education in Canada,” http://www.cmec.ca.}

In Alberta, where all new degrees and new degree providers are approved by the Minister, the Campus Alberta Quality Council formally adopted the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework for use by its evaluators when assessing the level of the proposed degree program. As well, institutions in the province are using it as they develop new degree programs. Although its assessment standards and processes were already generally consistent with those of the Ministerial Statement, the Statement has influenced Council’s policy development. For example, the Statement speaks of the need for institutions to have formal mechanisms to protect against the use of fraudulent credentials of academic staff. Council has now added this expectation to its policies with respect to academic staff.

Now that all provinces and territories in Canada have endorsed the Statement, the working group’s mandate is to discuss issues arising from the implementation of the Statement in each jurisdiction, to suggest ways to improve mutual recognition, to monitor quality assurance developments in other countries, to promote discussions of quality assurance issues and promote good practices of quality assurance, to work closely with other stakeholders, and to maintain and enhance the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework and the assessment standards and procedures. Some provinces, where arm’s-length quality assurance agencies exist, are exploring the possibility of mutual recognition agreements. British Columbia’s Degree Quality Assessment Board and the Campus Alberta Quality Council are working on this kind of agreement under the auspices of a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the ministers responsible for post-secondary education in the two provinces.

The work of CMEC and its working group in this area has raised awareness of the need to show how quality of degree programs is being assured in Canada. Other bodies, such as the Centre for Higher Education Research and Development (CHERD), in cooperation with the Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education (CSSHE), have hosted meetings to discuss degree recognition and the pros and cons of establishing a national accreditation system. While many argue that Canada doesn’t need another accreditation body, others think that something needs to be done, particularly as internationally there is an increasing expectation of external quality assurance. Although no clear consensus has emerged, there is certainly recognition that a pan-Canadian approach to describing the credentials offered using consistent and common assessment standards is a useful first step.
QUALITY ASSURANCE AND THE ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES OF CANADA (AUCC):

Although the agenda of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, is to create a pan-Canadian framework for quality assurance in Canada’s post-secondary institutions, it is not, nor could it have been, a federal or national framework of the kind the other countries represented at this conference can boast. The lack of a truly federal initiative in Canada can be traced, as has already pointed out, directly to the division of powers between the provinces and the federal government, as articulated in Canada’s constitution.

The Constitution Act of 1867 [renewed in 1982, when the constitution was repatriated] is unequivocal about the role of the provinces with respect to education. It states that “In and for each Province the legislature may exclusively make Laws in relation to Education … [Section 93]. This definition applies to elementary, secondary and tertiary levels of education, but its applicability to tertiary education, as delivered by universities, colleges and technical institutes is complicated by the wide mandate that these institutions carry, as organizations that provide not only higher education, but also lifelong learning, research and scholarship.

Without stepping on the toes of the provincial governments, the federal government in Canada has over the years established its own interest in higher education. The traditional roles of the Canadian government in fostering a strong and vibrant post-secondary system have been defined as follows:

a) research, scholarship and creative activity;

b) the provision, through transfer payments from federal coffers to provincial ones, of operating funding to be administered and allocated by the provinces;

c) campus infrastructure and facilities;

d) student assistance, in the form of scholarships and bursaries;

e) internationalization, including vehicles to promote student mobility both within Canada and abroad;


If we restrict ourselves to only a few of these six domains of federal government activity, we can demonstrate quickly the enormous and generally positive influence that the federal government has had recently on the quality of Canadian post-secondary education. Thanks to federal government investments, the three granting councils in Canada (devoted, respectively to the support of research and graduate students in health [CIHR], engineering and science [NSERC], and social sciences and humanities [SSHRC]) have received $1.7B in direct support, together with another $300M to support indirect costs and together with a Canada Research Chairs Program that has provided $300M to attract and retain stars for the Canadian system. Infrastructure in Canadian universities has been the beneficiary of an investment, over the last decade or
so, of $3.7B. The Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, originally endowed with $2.5B, has made $350M available annually to students. Although the federal government cannot be seen to be challenging the authority of the provinces in things educational, it is clear that the provinces and the institutions within them have accepted these generous infusions of funds (even when there have been matching requirements) and have appreciated the “trickle-down” effects that they have brought to the educational environment, to students, their professors, and their classrooms and labs. In my opinion as a former Provost, the quality of the Canadian system has been improved, no doubt, because of the ways in which the federal government has chosen to intervene in what is customarily and legally seen as a provincial jurisdiction.  

Some of the credit for the creation and perpetuation of these federal programs should go to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), an organization created in 1911 and claiming as members today some 91 public and private not-for-profit universities and university-level colleges. The AUCC does research, analysis and advocacy at a national level for its member institutions, which are represented by their presidents or executive heads who work together in pursuit of a common national agenda. It is from the AUCC’s submission to the new Conservative government of Canada in September, 2006, that we drew our description of the six areas in which the federal government has staked a claim, and has been encouraged by the AUCC and others to continue to operate. And it is largely because of AUCC’s vigilance and advocacy with the federal government that universities and colleges have become increasingly (and on the whole, gratefully) dependent on extra-provincial government funding. Indirectly, moreover, the result of the advocacy and the undertakings given by AUCC on behalf of its 91 members means that those institutions are now formally accountable, in unprecedented ways, not only to their provincial but also to their federal funders.

We have spent some time mapping out the post-secondary political terrain in Canada in order to situate AUCC’s interest in quality assurance within an appropriate context. The AUCC is careful to assert that it is not a formal accrediting agency, though it also acknowledges that membership in AUCC is often thought to be “tantamount” to the accreditation of an institution, given the absence of a national accreditation body. Noting that CAQC recommends approval of specific programs referred to it, but does not recommend on the accreditation of the institutions that offer those programs, we think it useful to append the full set of eligibility criteria AUCC has established for membership.

Needless to say, many of the criteria for membership in AUCC could be construed as quality assurance devices, even though AUCC explicitly disavows a role as a formal

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6 It is important to note that some but not all of the provinces in Canada have created very strong and well-funded programs in support of research, scholarship and innovation. In Alberta for example, large infusions of funding have been invested in endowments for the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research($1.2B for researchers in health and wellness), for the Alberta Ingenuity Fund ($1B for researchers in science and engineering), and for the informatics Circles of Research Excellence (iCORE) program (a smaller amount for researchers in information technologies.) In addition, provincial money in Alberta and in other provinces has been dedicated, sometimes selectively, to meet the federal government’s matching requirements, which typically require institutions receiving $0.40 from Ottawa to leverage another $0.60 from other sources.
quality assurance body. We venture to say that the “cut-and-paste” function of word-processing programs is now hard at work in Alberta at least, as some of the colleges recently granted the ability to offer degrees re-use and re-tool, in applications for membership in AUCC, materials and documents originally prepared to meet the organizational and program review standards that we at CAQC have established. Currently, the AUCC does not regard passage through the quality assurance filters in any of the provinces in Canada as a sufficient reason, in and of itself, to grant an applicant institution membership.

Building on the criterion requiring all Canadian institutions belonging to AUCC to have an internal “quality assurance policy that results in cyclical or continuous assessment of all its academic programs,” AUCC has recently surveyed its members on their quality assurance protocols. On its website, AUCC now provides links to these protocols, as well to the provincial or regional assessment bodies, such as the CAQC in Alberta, Degree Quality Assessment Board in British Columbia, and the Post-secondary Education Quality Assessment Board in Ontario. Officials from AUCC frequently point out that a critical raison d’être for its involvement in quality assurance is to assure foreign governments, institutions and students that Canada does have a robust regime of quality assurance mechanisms, notwithstanding the absence in this country of a national accrediting body and notwithstanding the lack of a formal coalition of provincial and regional bodies such as the ones we have mentioned. It is perhaps timely to point out that over the last year there have been conferences and conversations dedicated to the need for a more cohesive national QA system, but it is as yet unclear whether AUCC, or CMEC or some other group would take the lead on such a venture. One conversation that might be the basis for a national coalition is the previously noted undertaking between DQAB in British Columbia and CAQC in Alberta to explore a form of reciprocity.

Before we go on to the accrediting procedures employed by some of the professions and professional associations, let us remember that AUCC, formed as a partnership among member institutions, tends to defer to institutional autonomy and is highly respectful of the QA systems that it insists its members have in place. Some of those mechanisms are clearly pre-emptive (as they have been in Australia, for example) and have undoubtedly been stimulated by the insistence on accountability that provincial governments, and government organizations such as CAQC, have brought to bear on the quality of academic programming. A question to reiterate, then, is whether internal QA mechanisms, even if they rely on external peer-review, have the credibility that external QA mechanisms, also reliant on peer-review, claim to have. To put the question in a different way, how do we define “arm’s-length”?

7 AUCC was the signatory, on behalf of Canadian universities, of the statement on “Sharing Quality Higher Education Across Borders” (2004), which was also signed by ACE, CHEA and the IAU. That statement was based, in turn, on UNESCO’s document on cross-border education.
ACCREDITATION OF PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMS AS A FORM OF QUALITY ASSURANCE:

A version of national accreditation exists in Canada for a wide array of professional programs. Some are indigenous to Canada—e.g., the processes run by the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board (CEAB), or the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work, or the Canadian Architectural Certification Board. Some—for medicine, business administration, and veterinary medicine—intersect with the expectations and requirements of American agencies, which purport to have international reach. The AUCC website lists over 80 agencies that have responsibility for accrediting educational programs in post-secondary programs in Canada. These accrediting agencies operate, of course, at the program level. They do not accredit institutions, departments, faculties or students, who often must be licensed, chartered or registered in order to practice in their professional field of choice.  

Participation in professional accrediting programs is often purely voluntary. It is not at all a requirement that business programs in Canada be accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), for example, and it is ostensibly the case that engineering programs need not go through the elaborate processes of the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board. For social work, MD and architecture programs, on the other hand, accreditation is a *sine qua non*. But there is no question that whether required or not, meeting or exceeding the stipulations and standards of these agencies is regarded as an important seal of approval and an important branding device, nationally and sometimes internationally. Some of these agencies, while free-standing and independent of one another, have banded together under the aegis of the Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada, an Association linked to the Standards Council of Canada, a federal Crown Corporation. The Association of Accrediting Agencies [http://www.aaac.ca/](http://www.aaac.ca/) has been offering, since 2003, an on-line training course for evaluators who, whatever the professional community of which they are a part, are engaged to perform a remarkably similar set of quality-assuring tasks (e.g., understand and uphold accreditation standards, review critically self-study documents against those standards, conduct site-visits, write candid reports and recommend on accreditation for a certain duration to Boards and other decision-making bodies.)

We will refer here solely to the accrediting processes overseen by the CEAB and by the American Veterinary Medicine Association, which accredit engineering and veterinary medicine programs, respectively. We are regarding these two bodies and the processes they have generated as typical of the variety of approaches used by accreditors in the post-secondary educational environment in Canada.

A committee of the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers, the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board has been accrediting Canadian engineering programs in

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8 Athabasca University, in Alberta, positions itself not only as “Canada’s open university,” but also as the first Canadian institute to have achieved accreditation through the Middle States Higher Education Commission in the U.S.
universities since 1965 (see http://www.ecpe.ca/). Overseen by a group of 15 people
drawn from private, public and academic sectors, it describes its standards and processes
in a 40-page document. Those who apply for accreditation must complete a detailed
questionnaire, which is in effect a self-study, and must interact with a team of site
visitors, who examine qualitatively and quantitatively the curriculum, the academic and
professional quality of faculty, the adequacy of laboratories, equipment and computer
facilities and the quality of the students’ work. The panel then reports its finding to the
Board. Note that the review team does not make direct recommendations to the Board,
which is uniquely empowered, on the basis of the review team’s findings to determine
whether to grant or extend accreditation of the program in question for a period of up to
six years.

New programs can be accredited only after graduates from them have emerged. In
Canada, according to the CEAB, engineering programs must not be too narrowly focused
if they are going to qualify for accreditation: they must involve “not only adequate
mathematics, science and engineering, but they must also develop communication skills
and an understanding of the environmental, cultural, economic and social impacts of
engineering on society and of the concept of sustainable development.” The CEAB
specifies its expectations with a high degree of precision, and there is no question both
that its standards are high and that its appetite for enforcing those standards is hearty.

A noteworthy feature of CEAB’s work is that it acknowledges the prospect of assessment
and recognition of prior studies and prior learning. As well, it undertakes to establish
“substantial international equivalencies” and under that initiative recognizes engineering
programs in Austria, Cost Rica and Russia as having substantially met CEAB standards.
The CEAB is also a signatory to the “Washington Accord” and participates in a variety of
mutual recognition agreements that embrace engineering programs from across the
world.

The very existence of muscular quality assurance regimes in professional disciplines
poses serious questions for other forms and levels of quality assurance. To what extent
should an institutional unit approval and review process defer to (or incorporate) the
work of the CEAB when considering Faculties of Engineering or departments within
them? To what extent does a rigorous process such as the CEAB’s become a tail that
wags the institutional dog, as deans of engineering attempt to use findings of CEAB
teams in order to acquire from central sources (which have only nominal involvement in
the actual review process) financial and other resources? To what extent should a
regional body such as the CAQC genuflect in front of processes such as the CEAB’s and
to what extent should it attempt to negotiate with the CEAB and with other professional
accrediting bodies (over 80, remember, in Canada) a mutually beneficial modus operandi,
in which cooperation on the one hand and independence on the other are both
conspicuous?

In Alberta’s institutions, it is clear that the extramural processes of an agency like the
CEAB will not supplant or supersede in-house approval and quality review processes. It
is equally clear that the CAQC will consider the fact that accreditation processes exist,
but will not bow slavishly to them. We are prepared, however, to accommodate to those processes, at least to some extent. With the proposal from the University of Calgary that it be authorized to offer a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine credential, Marilyn Patton has from the start worked both with senior university officials such as the VPA and the Dean at the University and with a senior staff member of the American Veterinary Medicine Association, an American body with jurisdiction over Canadian as well American vet schools. Marilyn participated last June in part of a preliminary site visit, designed to acquaint AVMA officials with the chief elements of the program then under construction, and she will participate as well this spring in the “real” site visit, when the review team from the AVMA will be supplemented by two experts chosen by the CAQC. The CAQC and the AVMA have agreed to share some of the other’s documentation, while recognizing that the two organizations have different but overlapping goals, objectives and standards, and it is understood as well that each set of reviewers will issue separate reports to their parent bodies. 9 This experimental procedure will, we hope, reduce the amount of work to be done by a new dean and a small, fledgling Faculty.

CONCLUSION:

In a utopian world, Canada would harness the embarrassment of riches we have described here and would capitalize on the strong interest that individual institutions, provincial and federal governments, and professional accrediting bodies all demonstrate in institutional autonomy, accountability, student mobility, and assurance of quality in academic programming. There would be a single integrated system with roles and responsibilities defined clearly under the yoke of a pan-Canadian framework. 10 In a utopian world, quality assurance agencies in the various provinces and territories of Canada would have very similar mandates, functions, standards and procedures, and their modes of interacting, both with their government overseers and with the institutions within their amits, would be based on a common set of understandings about what those relationships should be. Ultimately, we think it would be disingenuous for us to propose that Canada can achieve this utopian goal quickly, if at all, but we think that Canada should try to move in the direction of that vision. This paper has suggested a few ways in which, within the Canadian context, those committed to quality assurance might try to move forward in reducing redundancies and overlaps in order to create greater efficiency, effectiveness and yes, accountability, in the management of multiple and overlapping quality assurance arrangements.

9 A small but significant example of divergent expectations is that the AVMA does not require consultation with other institutions that might be affected by or might contribute to a new DVM program, whereas consultation of this sort is a requirement of the CAQC.

10 Although there are clear points of similarity among and between the provincial quality assurance agencies, such as PEQAB, DQAB and the CAQC, there are many point of difference as well. For example, in Alberta, but not in some other jurisdictions, the Quality Council is composed to ensure that there is a strong nucleus of academics and academic administrators on board. Also in Alberta, new programs in universities, as the DVM example makes clear, must pass muster in the program review processes of Council. In other jurisdictions, the assessment board concerns itself only with proposals from colleges or out-of-province providers. The recent creation of a Higher Education Quality Council in Ontario, the responsibilities of which are considerably broader than those carried by PEQAB, the provincial quality assessment board, adds a further layer of complexity to the quality assurance arrangements across Canada.
Appendix

Eligibility Criteria for Full Membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges
of Canada

[March, 2007]

(1) Institutional Members

Institutional Members shall be those universities and colleges named in the Schedule to
the Act of Parliament incorporating the Association and such other Canadian
universities and university-degree level colleges as are from time to time recommended
for Institutional Membership by the Board and are approved by vote of the Association,
provided that each of such universities and university-degree level colleges, including
those federated with, affiliated to or a constituent portion of a university, shall satisfy the
following conditions:

(a) It has the powers it purports to exercise pursuant to authority granted by the Crown
or by Statute or by formal agreement with its affiliated or federated university, or the
university of which it is a constituent portion;

(b) It has governance and an administrative structure appropriate to a university,
including:

- Authority vested in academic staff for decisions affecting academic programs
  including admissions, content, graduation requirements/standards, and related
  policies and procedures through membership on an elected academic senate or
  other appropriate elected body representative of academic staff;

- An independent board of governors, or appropriate equivalent, that:
  - is committed to public accountability and functions in an open and
    transparent manner;
  - has control over the institution's finances, administration and
    appointments;
  - includes appropriate representation from the institution's external
    stakeholders (including the general public), from academic staff, from
    students and from alumni; and
  - uses the institution's resources to advance its mission and goals.

- A senior administration normally including a president and vice-presidents
  and/or other senior officers appropriate to the size of the institution and the range
  of its activities.

(c) It has an approved, clearly articulated and widely known and accepted mission
statement and academic goals that are appropriate to a university and that
demonstrate its commitment to: (i) teaching and other forms of dissemination of
knowledge; (ii) research, scholarship, academic inquiry and the advancement of knowledge; and (iii) service to the community.

(d) It has as its core teaching mission the provision of education of university standard with the majority of its programs at that level.

(e) It offers a full program or programs of undergraduate and/or graduate studies that animate its mission and goals, and that lead to a university degree or degrees conferred by itself or, if federated or affiliated with, or a constituent of a university, by the parent institution. Indicators will include:

- Highly qualified academic staff holding the PhD or other appropriate terminal degree, and relevant professional experience where appropriate;
- Undergraduate programs taught by senior academic staff;
- A quality assurance policy that results in cyclical or continuous assessment of all of its academic programs and support services, and which includes the participation by those directly involved in delivery of the program or service, as well as by other institutional colleagues and external experts and stakeholders;
- Provision for the periodic evaluation of the performance of academic staff including a student assessment component;
- Access to library and other learning resources appropriate to the institution's mission, goals and programs;
- The periodical monitoring of graduate outcomes, and established and transparent processes for disseminating this information inside and outside the institution;
- Academic counselling and other student services appropriate to its programs;
- Financial resources to meet its mission statement and goals;

(f) Its undergraduate degree programs are characterized by breadth and depth in the traditional areas of the liberal arts and/or sciences, and first degrees of a professional nature - such as medicine, law, teacher education, engineering - have a significant liberal arts and/or sciences component.

(g) It has a proven record of scholarship, academic inquiry and research, expects its academic staff to be engaged in externally peer reviewed research and to publish in externally disseminated sources, and provides appropriate time and institutional support for them to do so. Indicators of this commitment will include policies and programs pertaining to the creation of knowledge, the development of curriculum and the execution of research projects.

(h) It ensures an atmosphere that:

- promotes and protects the honest search for knowledge without fear of reprisal by the institution or third parties;
- protects the communication of knowledge and the results of scholarship and research;
- values intellectual honesty, fairness and integrity, and promotes accountability;
• encourages the highest standards in scholarship and research;
• respects the academic freedom and rights of others; and
• expects the exercise of academic freedom in a reasonable and responsible manner

In this regard, the institution has approved and clearly articulated policies on academic freedom, intellectual integrity and the ownership of intellectual property, and a plan for informing students and academic staff about their roles and responsibilities.

(i) If it is a freestanding institution, neither in a formal relationship of affiliation or federation nor a constituent portion of a member university, it has in the academic year in which it makes application for membership, and has had in the two preceding years, an enrolment of at least 500 FTE students enrolled in university degree programs.

(j) If it is a constituent of an Institutional Member, its application for membership is supported by its parent institution.

(k) It operates on a not-for-profit basis.

(l) It satisfies the Board, after receiving a report by a Visiting Committee appointed by the Board, that it is providing education of university standard and meets the criteria for membership in the Association.

An institution that does not meet all of the criteria for membership may not re-apply for a period of three (3) years.

(AUCC members are invited to reaffirm their adherence to the criteria for membership in the association every five years commencing in 2005 [see http://www.aucc.ca])
INTRODUCTION
This paper, which is intended to form the basis for a more detailed report, presents the findings of a benchmarking project between ACQUIN (Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute, Germany), AUQA (Australian Universities Quality Agency) and HETAC (Higher Education and Training Awards Council, Ireland). In 2005-06 each of these External Quality Assurance (EQA) agencies underwent a self-review and external evaluation, which provided the basis for the benchmarking relative to internationally accepted standards.

The decision of these agencies to participate in a benchmarking exercise stemmed from their desire to place their external review into an international context.

The standards developed by trans-national agencies such as ENQA and INQAAHE also offered internationally recognised frameworks within which the benchmarking partners’ review experiences could be shared.

NATIONAL CONTEXTS
The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC)
Ireland is a parliamentary democracy with a written constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann). It is a unitary State and has a very highly centralised education system. Higher education in Ireland is provided by seven universities, fourteen institutes of technology (IoTs) and over thirty other institutions of various size and character.

The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) was established in June 2001 under the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. It is a State body with a statutorily prescribed relationship with the IoTs in the areas of awards and quality assurance. On the other hand, the private and other specialist providers (for example, the Garda (Police) College and the Military College) engage with HETAC on a voluntary basis – they see a strategic reason for securing HETAC accreditation for their programmes. All recognised colleges and institutions may run programmes from Certificate level (Level 6 of Ireland’s National Framework for Qualifications) up to PhD doctorate level (Level 10 on Ireland’s NFQ).

While clearly aware of the role prescribed within the Qualifications Act 1999, HETAC enjoys full independence in terms of the manner of executing these functions and the decisions it makes in fulfilling its mission. HETAC is also independent of the providers. It operates with a Council of 15 members, three of whom are nominated by Ministers of Government.
**Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA)**

Australia has a federal system of government where power is shared between the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia (the federal government) and the governments of the nation’s States and Territories. The six Australian States are essentially self-governing in certain areas designated under the Constitution, while the two ‘Territories (Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory) are more directly controlled by the Commonwealth. In the Australian higher education system, the Commonwealth Government sets national policy directions and is the major source of public funding, while the States and Territories have the legislative authority to pass acts establishing new universities. They also have established statutory bodies or government departments with the power to recognise non-university providers of higher education, and to approve the quality of their programmes by subjecting them to external accreditation. Co-ordination of policies throughout the federal system is achieved through the Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), which is the group of ministers with relevant portfolio responsibilities.

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) was established by MCEETYA in March 2000 as an independent national agency which promotes, audits, and reports on quality assurance in Australian higher education. It operates independently of governments and the higher education sector under the direction of a Board of twelve Directors. AUQA currently audits Australia’s 43 universities and other ‘self-accrediting’ higher education institutions, and the nine State & Territory accreditation agencies.

**Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN)**

In the German Federal System, the Governments of the 16 Laender (Federal States) are autonomous in passing their own university laws (Landeshochschulgesetze) concerning higher education and in establishing new Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Most of the German HEIs are recognised and as such, are fully or partly funded by the Governments. However, quality assurance in higher education was achieved through the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) who defined framework regulations for studies and examinations. Since 1999, arising from Bologna Process inspired reforms, there has been a fundamental change in the relationship between the Governments of the Laender and the HEIs through the implementation of the Bachelor/Master degree structure and as such, the framework regulations were no longer applicable. This led to the implementation of the accreditation system in Germany. As a result, the German Accreditation Council (Akkreditierungsrat AR) has the authority for recognising institutions and agencies, whose major tasks are the accreditation of individual study programmes. All HEIs implementing Bachelor and Master programmes have to approve the quality of their courses through external quality assurance (accreditation).

ACQUIN is one of six agencies in Germany accredited by the Accreditation Council (AR). It was established on 26 January 2001 as a self-governing organisation for HEIs with a legal status of a registered, non-profit association. Some 130 higher education institutions are members of ACQUIN located in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Hungary and the USA. ACQUIN also has links with specific academic societies and professional associations. It carries out accreditation procedures at members and non-members institutions. ACQUIN is not influenced by the Government of States and is autonomous.
in the spirit of academic tradition. Its independence is underpinned by those participating in the decision–making process including representatives of students and professional practice. ACQUIN is organised principally on the basis of a Board, the General Assembly and the Accreditation Commission.

**COMPARISON OF ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT**

While each agency has responsibility for the promotion of quality assurance either through quality audits or in the context of accreditation procedures, it is important to note that there are key differences which shape the organisational context of the external reviews. Some of these are as follows:

a. Both HETAC and ACQUIN are legislatively based, with their mission and objectives set within such framework. AUQA was originally the product of a political decision of the federal and state Ministers with responsibility for higher education.

b. In terms of mission, AUQA is very directly focussed on quality audit, while HETAC’s remit embrace both programme accreditation and quality assurance. ACQUIN’s mission is very much within the programme accreditation domain and quality assurance is pursued within that context. However, ACQUIN’s recent development of criteria and procedures for the accreditation of a process-based quality approach in HEIs within the joint pilot project “Process Quality for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education” which is aimed at enhancing quality assurance processes in HEIs will bring it closer to the HETAC mission.

c. All Australian self-accrediting HEIs are subject to quality audit by the AUQA, while HETAC is responsible for the Irish extra university sector, both State-aided and private providers. In the case of ACQUIN, it is possible for HEIs to avail of accreditation services from any of the six accreditation agencies in Germany;

d. Income from the Government (either at federal or central levels) represent a substantial part of the income for AUQA and HETAC, while ACQUIN relies on income accrued from the provision of its services.

e. While all three agencies have made efforts to include stakeholders within their Boards/Councils, both HETAC and ACQUIN have formal representation from parties external to the higher education system. This wider representation extends to further governance processes, including programme accreditation panels, while AUQA includes an auditor drawn from industry or business in its audit panels.

f. Reflecting more on their mission, HETAC and ACQUIN make extensive use (including the delegation of decision-making power) to a sub-committee structure to assist their board/council in their performance of their role, while AUQA being a smaller organisation has a more unitary organisational structure.

g. The consequence of the decisions of the three agencies impacts in different way. While HETAC and ACQUIN could potentially impact on the financial viability of the provider, in its first Cycle of audits, AUQA relied primarily on the reaction of the public to generate an appropriate response to an adverse report on an institution.

**YES, BUT IS IT GOOD PRACTICE?**

“And what is good Phaedrus, and what is not good, need we ask anyone to tell us these things?” (Socrates – from The Phaedrus Dialogue, Plato)

However, for all of these differences, the engagement of all three agencies with their constituencies is predicated on the desire to embed quality improvement in higher
education. All agencies recognise the need to promote institutional ownership of quality assurance processes, which will ultimately increase the relevance of higher education to the economic and social fabric of their respective countries. The central tenet of commissioning an external review emphasises the acceptance of organisations that self-review is a necessary but insufficient condition for the purpose of achieving assurance of quality. Unless subject to some form of external validation, pure self-assessment, no matter how detailed and well executed, is always only a self-referencing activity. This axiom applies equally to the assessment of the academic work of undergraduate or PhD candidates performed by universities, as it does in reviewing the work of EQAs. Not only that, but the third party perspective being brought to the validation, must be a judicious mix of relevant technical expertise, and a detached external stakeholder perspective. This is a fundamental principle of EQA.

ACQUIN, AUQA, and HETAC all routinely employ a combination of self-assessment / evaluation and external peer review processes in the performance of their core quality assurance functions, albeit for the different purposes of programme accreditation or institutional audit. Similarly, ACQUIN, AUQA and HETAC all undertook a self-review of their own quality assurance functions, which was then subject to review by an external third party. By such process it is possible to test the quality of the judgements being made or delivered, and so state what was found to be ‘good’, and what was ‘not good’ with some degree of external validity.

The three benchmarking partners then took this external testing process a step further by exchanging the three complete sets of review findings in order to share good practice and to learn from each other’s experiences in order to improve. In effect the three benchmarking partners each asked the others ‘what is good practice in QA, and what is not good practice in QA’ based on the experience of our own reviews?

**LEARNING FROM THE BENCHMARKING PROJECT**

At the outset, all three agencies benefited from the external review – a genuinely independent review of an organisation allows it to evaluate its continued importance and also affirms its role and mission in the ever-changing landscape of higher education. The following represents a brief summary of the key findings:

a. **Source of Review**

AUQA differed markedly from its two European benchmarking partners in this exercise, in that it was able to initiate its own self-review and it commissioned an external review as a commitment to good practice in QA, rather than having to have a review performed because it was formally required by some official arm of Government. AUQA was also able to subject itself to virtually the identical quality review process that it uses in its own audits of universities, to which it then volunteered to undertake an evaluation against the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice to add another dimension of external reference for the quality evaluation process.

ACQUIN on the other hand was formally required to undergo a review by AR, and to follow an accreditation agency approval programme developed, approved and implemented by AR, and which included evaluation against the ENQA standards.
HETAC was somewhere in-between: like ACQUIN, it was legislatively required to undergo an external review, but (similar to AUQA) HETAC chose to evaluate itself (and be externally reviewed) against the ENQA standards and guidelines.

b. External Review Findings
The findings of the three external reviews therefore differed considerably in terms of the consequences for the agency concerned, from the possible loss of formal recognition as a recognised accrediting body, through to the acknowledgement of organisational strengths and opportunities for improvement by peers. Notwithstanding this range of possible outcomes, and allowing for the differences in national contexts, all three EQA’s quality practices are guided by virtually interchangeable quality principles. They share similar values and have developed similar mission statements, and therefore not surprisingly the elements of the quality review processes, practices, and methodologies they all employ are similar. For example, all three EQAs have adopted a self-assessment led review process, followed by an expert peer review process to validate the results of the self-assessment.

It is worth noting that the major positive findings of the external reviews for the three agencies are very similar, in that they acknowledge that each agency is successfully achieving its primary purpose, and handling this in an effective manner. Specifically, they noted the following for each agency:

i. The HETAC external review panel found that it “is satisfied that HETAC had performed effectively its principal statutory functions since its establishment and has developed policies and procedures for each function which are being implemented and will be operated as appropriate”.

ii. The ACQUIN external review panel states that “since its foundation ACQUIN showed a good qualitative and quantitative performance. It has a well documented quality approach and understanding which is the basis for the evaluation and assessment procedures. ACQUIN has a clear profile and has made important contributions to the accreditation system in Germany”.

iii. The AUQA external review panel commended AUQA for “successfully establishing a credible peer review approach and the fitness-for-purpose model of quality audits in the first cycle” and that AUQA is “realising its vision statements”.

c. Areas for Improvement
Notwithstanding the positive endorsement from the review panels, the panels identified areas for major improvement in the three agencies’ quality management systems. Again, the individual reports noted that

i. HETAC give urgent attention to the training of reviewers, consider a more flexible approach to validation of programmes and to publish all reports as a matter of principle.

ii. A stronger formalisation of ACQUIN’s internal quality management system and a stricter separation of the different working areas be initiated.

iii. Additional strategies be investigated by AUQA to minimise time lag between audits and publication of reports, minimise perceived inconsistencies between reports, and to improve auditee follow-up to audit findings.
d. **Compliance with Internationally Recognised Standards**

With respect to the three agencies’ compliance with the external evaluation benchmarks used in the three reviews:

i. The HETAC external review panel found that it “is satisfied that in the performance of (its principal statutory) functions, HETAC complies with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.”

ii. The report of the ACQUIN found that it “conducted accreditation procedures satisfy the content related quality requirements (criteria 7-14) as well as the process oriented requirements (criteria 15-20) of the AR regulations “Criteria for the Accreditation of Accreditation Agencies”. With small restrictions ACQUIN is in accordance with the “Criteria for Accreditation of Accreditation Agencies” which have been passed by the AR on December 15, 2005 and have been applied in the accreditation procedure of ACQUIN” “The Foundation for the Accreditation of Programmes in Germany (the Foundation)...... accredits the Accreditation Certification and Quality Assurance Institute ACQUIN” according the following terms and awards in this respect, the authority to accredit study programmes by awarding the seal of the Foundation.”

iii. The AUQA external review panel commended AUQA for “generally meeting the requirements of the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice”;

e. **Review Panel Composition and Methodology**

With respect to the composition of the external review panels, all three agencies’ reviews had a mix of ‘local’ (i.e. home country) and ‘international’ panel members, with panel membership drawn from a range of different stakeholder perspectives. This panel composition ensures that there was an appropriate balance between ‘QA expertise’ and externality being brought to decision making in the self-review validation process.

For example, the AUQA external panel paralleled the composition of a standard AUQA audit panel (see panel composition categories in brackets) but faithful to the ‘fitness-for-purpose’ principle, with two rather than one international EQA experts, one from the UK and one from South Africa (International); the Director General of Education from one of the Australian states (Academic); the Chair of the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (Academic); and the Chief Executive of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Industry)..  

In the ACQUIN expert panel, all relevant groups involved in quality assurance were represented including an expert of quality assurance (member of the Accreditation Council), a stakeholder representative (employer), a student representative and a representative of the HEI. Again, the panel had an appropriate mix of national and international expertise in the panel.

HETAC’s panel followed a similar composition to that of ACQUIN. The seven members (five of whom were international) were drawn from the European and United States higher education domain. However, the approach of the panel in the case of HETAC’s was more extensive that those of ACQUIN and AUQA, in that all
stands of its providers were interviewed, along with extensive engagement with a representative cohort of learners, sub-committee members, HETAC executive staff.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?
Each agency is now in the process of incorporating the recommendations of their external review panels in their operations. In the case of HETAC, it is responding to the question of enhancing the training of its panel members, while AUQA are now revising their vision, mission, and objectives statements while planning their second cycle of institutional audits, taking on board the comments and reflections of the external panel. ACQUIN is now developing a stronger formalisation of its internal quality management system and building up structures for a better separation of the different working areas.

CONCLUSION
The benchmarking project has illustrated how distinct internationally accepted standards may serve as a framework for comparison. Clearly, there was little value from AUQA using the European Standards and Guidelines as a basis for its review and therefore, it relied on INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice to inform its review. However, perhaps due to the membership profile of INQAAHE and ENQA, it was possible to ‘knit’ these together and facilitate a truly international benchmarking exercise. Such an approach reflects the global dimension of higher education and the increasing mobile student body.

All three agencies embarked on this project, intent of sharing experiences and offering insight to other agencies starting on similar paths. While the detail of the experiences and other learning points will be evident in the report arising from this project, one key message for all is that quality assurance is a journey and as such, it is continuous. All three agencies emerged from the exercise with their reputation enhanced and ultimately, their clients and other stakeholders will benefit from this. However, those advocating and articulating the standards as a means to confirm the status of agencies must maintain vigilance and ensure that they are continually modified to reflect the ever-changing landscape in higher education. The report due for publication from this project will elaborate more strongly on this point.

It is perhaps more appropriate to conclude with Darwin’s famous quote:

“It is not the strongest species that survives, not the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change.”
Abstract
By presenting experiences from a project of the Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA), this paper provides a contribution to the debate on international standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies.

The paper argues that the European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance represent a major step towards transparency and mutual trust across national borders. The decision to establish a register for external quality assurance agencies operating in Europe illustrates the commitment to base quality assurance of higher education on a set of joint standards.

However, the establishment of a register naturally also entails a number of challenges. The paper focuses on possible obstacles, which should be addressed in order to ensure an effective implementation of the standards and consistent assessments of agencies across Europe. The paper also suggests some ways to handle the identified challenges and present some recent developments in relation to the implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines.
**Introduction**

Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education (NOQA) is a forum for information dissemination, exchanging experiences and pursuing projects of mutual interest. The main objective is to create a joint understanding of different Nordic viewpoints on issues related to quality assurance of higher education. The network has a long tradition of conducting an annual joint project. The 2005-06 project, which resulted in a report published in the ENQA occasional paper series in 2006\(^1\), focused on the – at the time of the initiation of the project - just agreed European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area\(^2\).

**Purpose**

The project aimed at sharing and comparing practices among the Nordic agencies, for mutual inspiration concerning how organisations, processes and procedures could be enhanced in light of the new European standards and guidelines. By making different national solutions known, and by sharing experiences, it was an expressed hope that the Nordic agencies could inspire each other – and maybe also other agencies around Europe – with ways of coping with present and future challenges related to the themes covered by the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance agencies. Furthermore it was an expressed desire that the project would lead to a clarification of how the European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies could be interpreted and made operational for assessments of agencies’ compliance with the requirements they contain. In that sense, the project also aimed to contribute to discussions at a European level - e.g. the discussions about implementation of the planned register of European quality assurance agencies - and to internal discussions in other countries, e.g. countries preparing an application for inclusion of their national agency in the register.

**Focus**

The project took its point of departure in The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area as proposed by ENQA and adopted by the responsible ministers under the Bologna Process at their meeting in Bergen in May 2005. The standards and their attached guidelines are in three parts covering (1) internal quality assurance of higher education institutions, (2) external quality assurance of higher education, and (3) quality assurance of external quality assurance agencies.

The project only focused on the standards and guidelines in part 3, concerning external quality assurance agencies, and included discussions of each of the standards and guidelines in this part of the ENQA report. One exception, though, is the standard 3.1, as this refers to the large number of standards in part 2, concerning external quality assurance. This means that the project has included reflections on the following themes:

- Official status
- Activities
- Resources
- Mission statement
- Independence
- External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies
- Accountability procedures.

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In the project report each of these standards and guidelines are discussed at a general level, focusing on the different aspects related to the wording of the text. Furthermore, the requirements contained in each standard and its attached guidelines are discussed in detail.

**Outcome**
The European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance represent a major step towards transparency and mutual trust across national borders. The common reference points have generated a high degree of attention to and awareness of the importance of quality assurance both at institutional and national level. The quality assurance agencies have benefited from the fact that they are now able to benchmark themselves to a set of joint standards and expectations. This has initiated processes of reflection, development and change throughout Europe. The establishment of a register will also enhance the credibility of the work of the external quality assurance agencies.

However, the discussions and reflections in the course of the Nordic project have also pointed to a number of general dilemmas and uncertainties in the current set of European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies. These have been gathered and formulated into six challenges, which are presented in the subsequent sections.

**A. National traditions and legislation versus European Standards and Guidelines**

*Do national traditions and legislation allow an agency not to comply with the European standards and guidelines?*

It is stated in the ENQA report presenting the standards and guidelines that they are designed to be applicable to all quality assurance agencies in Europe, irrespective of their structure, function and size, and the national system in which they operate.

The NOQA project indicates that these aspirations can only be met, if the standards and guidelines for quality assurance agencies are perceived as addressing the whole national system of higher education, and not only the agencies as such. The project has brought about the experience that a quality assurance agency must be regarded in the context of its national higher education system, its role within the quality assurance system and even the national culture and traditions. For instance, it gives only little meaning to ask an agency to comply with the standards and guidelines if its national legislation distributes roles in the quality assurance system in such a way that the agency cannot operate in line with the European requirements.

Thus, the standards and guidelines for quality assurance agencies do not only imply a challenge to agencies, but might also challenge institutions, governments and other stakeholders as well. In the process of a review of an agency, it seems to be an open question as to how to assess an agency operating under legislation which is not in line with European standards. Will it be necessary to change the national legislation, and later on the agency’s operations, before the agency can be said to comply with the standards and guidelines? Or should the national context be viewed as a reason for allowing exemption from the European standards when considering the compliance of the agency?
B. The status of the guidelines

How can a consistent assessment of the many European agencies’ compliance with the standards and guidelines be assured?

The ENQA report recommends that any European agency should, at no greater than five-year intervals, conduct, or be submitted to, a cyclical external review of its processes and activities. The reviews of agencies should include an assessment of whether the agencies are in compliance with the European standards for external quality assurance agencies. The report suggests that national agencies should normally be reviewed on a national basis, respecting the subsidiarity principle. Assuring a consistent use of the standards thus becomes a challenge. The report also attempts to pin down the dimensions that should be taken into account when assessing an agency’s compliance with the many requirements.

The NOQA project has experienced that more precise threshold values regarding the different standards are required if the European agencies are to be reviewed and assessed in a consistent manner. One very important issue to clarify in this respect is the status of the guidelines. In some cases, the guidelines can be viewed as attempts to establish threshold values that provide more detailed information on how the standard should be interpreted. In other cases, they are formulated as new standards without direct reference to the wording of the standard.

In contrast, another experience of the NOQA project has been the importance of respecting the different national contexts and models when assessing an agency’s compliance with a standard. Therefore, it is equally important that the wording of the standards is kept generic and open to different systems, approaches, cultures and traditions.

C. The value of informal practices

What is the value of informal practices when considering an agency’s compliance with the standards and guidelines?

The ENQA report states that the generic principle applied in the formulation of standards and guidelines has the consequence that these focus more on what should be done than how they should be achieved. Nevertheless, the actual wording of the standards shows that priority is often given to written documents and formal arrangements, taking precedence over informal practices and arrangements.

The discussions during the NOQA project have shown that it is important to take into account both formal arrangements and the more informal, yet well-established, practices in order to gain a reliable picture of the actual situation of an agency. The argument goes both ways. The legislation and other formal arrangements surrounding an agency can be in full compliance with the relevant standards, but this does not guarantee that the actual practice also is in line with the European requirements. For instance, an agency can be formally independent from ministries and other formal stakeholders, but not independent in practice if the government places a high level of pressure on the agency through informal channels. The opposite situation can also be found, where an agency with poor formal foundations is actually permitted to act with a very high level of autonomy and independence.

The fact that legal documents and other formal arrangements are necessary, but insufficient factors concerning the operations of an agency, is a challenge that must be dealt with in the procedures and
methods applied in the reviews of the European agencies. There is no doubt that the assessment process will become more complicated – and the determination of threshold values more delicate – when informal arrangements and practices are to be taken into consideration.

D. Definition of central concepts

*How can the terminology used in the standards and guidelines become clearer?*

The standards and guidelines contain a considerable number of words assumed to be commonly used and understood by European agencies. In reality, the terms can be interpreted in different ways, and might very well gain different meanings as they are translated from English into other European languages.

The work with the standards and guidelines in the NOQA project has pointed to a number of terms which may need further clarification. One example is the term policy. What is a policy, and what should be the minimum requirements for the content of a document if it is to qualify for the label policy? Another example is the term procedures. Can procedures be well-established habits or cultures, or must the way to conduct operations be described in writing if it is to be accepted as a procedure? If the latter is the case, yet another question is how long must it have been in operation to be accepted as more than just a piece of paper? A similar line of questioning arises concerning the terms: goals and objectives, legal basis, management plan, mechanisms, etc.

Reflections on the meaning of these terms might be useful to both agencies and their assessors, but it is equally important that such reflections do not result in formulations that are too narrow and prescriptive.

E. The impact of non compliance with specific standards

*Must an agency comply with all standards in order to be considered as being in compliance with the European standards and guidelines?*

The ENQA report explicitly demands that agencies should comply with all standards if they are to be included in the planned register of external quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. This might imply that very few agencies could be accepted as being in compliance with European standards unless the agencies (or national governments) are willing and able to immediately follow-up on their shortcomings.

The discussions during the NOQA project concerning the Nordic agencies’ compliance with the standards have shown that, although their operations in general have a very high level of compliance with the intentions behind the standards, specific operations and circumstances of minor importance can make compliance with certain standards questionable. This can, for instance, be due to national legislation, e.g. legislation concerning the role of an agency in the follow-up on external quality assurance processes.

The experiences of the NOQA project suggest that while a review process conducted by a panel of peers or experts should include an assessment of the compliance with the individual standards and their attached guidelines, it should be possible for a Register Committee to make an overall assessment, distinguishing between vital and less vital requirements of the European standards.
F. The demands to reviews of agencies

Which demands should be made to assure a credible review process, including assessment of the agencies’ compliance with the European standards and guidelines for external quality assurance agencies?

The ENQA report assumes that review processes of agencies will primarily be organised at the national level. Although a growing interest for reviews organised by ENQA has been notable, an assessment of the credibility of the review process, and of the quality of the documentation in the review report, becomes an important and separate task for a Register Committee.

An important experience gained from producing national descriptions and assessments in the NOQA project is that such written accounts need to be discussed and clarified in order to understand the actual nature of processes and procedures, etc. Each agency tends to interpret the requirements of the standards and guidelines from their own national perspective, and the same terminology might have different implications and meanings in different countries.

The NOQA project suggests that the reviews of agencies should be thorough, and that it should be considered making a site-visit a mandatory element in the process in order to ensure the necessary documentation. This would enable the peer review group, or expert panel, to gain a deeper understanding of the working mode of the agency subject to review, including its interpretations of the standards and guidelines.

The independence of the peers or experts conducting a nationally organised review of an agency will, of course, be another important issue for a Register Committee to consider.

Recent developments

The European standards and guidelines for quality assurance agencies were created with the objectives of providing common reference points for agencies and of being used as the frame of reference in assessments of agencies applying for inclusion in the planned register for quality assurance agencies active in Europe. Since the political adoption of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, and since the Nordic project referred to in this paper was finalised, a number of important decisions have been taken.

One development is that so-called E4 Group finalised a proposal for the specific design of the planned register for quality assurance agencies operating in Europe in February 2007. The European Ministers of Education are expected to adopt the proposal and decide on the establishment of the register at their Bologna Summit in London in May 2007. The proposed design implies an exclusive register providing clear and reliable information about quality assurance agencies operating in Europe which conform to the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance agencies. Similar to one of the outcomes of the Nordic project, the design seems to acknowledge that a distinction between vital and less vital standards and guidelines is relevant. Furthermore it states that the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area probably will need to be revised from time to time. This will hopefully imply a definition of some

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3 This experience is very much in line with the conclusions in Crozier, Fiona et al., Quality Convergence Study, ENQA Occasional Papers 7, Helsinki, 2005.

4 The partners in the E4 Group are ENQA, ESIB (students), EUA (universities), and EURASHE (colleges).
of the central concepts, a clarification of the status of the guidelines and the establishment of clearer threshold values regarding the standards.

Another development is that ENQA has changed its membership regulations so that an applicant body will be required to satisfy the Board that it meets the European Standards and Guidelines concerning quality assurance agencies if to be accepted as full member. In relation to this ENQA has published guidelines for national reviews of ENQA member agencies. The guidelines are intended to help member agencies ensure that their national reviews will produce the information needed to satisfy the requirements of ENQA membership.

Like the suggested design of the register, these guidelines contain some expectations to the review process that - when followed - may assure that some of the challenges identified in the Nordic project can be overcome. One example is that the guidelines, though implicitly, make a site visit mandatory. Another is that they stress the importance of the independence of the experts and the management of the review process in general.

Furthermore, ENQA has established a “Committee for member reviews” to handle the initial scrutiny of member review reports and make recommendations to the Board. The recommendations from the Nordic project to the tasks and abilities of the Register Committee also apply to ENQA’s committee. For the purpose of consistency it seems relevant that the two committees - in a transitional period - engage in a common discussion of vital and less vital standards and agree on requirements to the credibility of the review process. In the long term, one could imagine that ENQA would rely on the assessments and decisions of the Register Committee.

Recent developments also include the implementation of the first European Quality Assurance Forum in November 2006 in Munich which provided an opportunity to discuss European developments in quality assurance. A seminar on the implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education organised by ENQA in cooperation with the Central and Eastern European Network (CEEN) which took place in December 2006 in Vienna should also be mentioned. The main goal was to analyse the contents and implementation of the European Standards and Guidelines from the viewpoint of the European quality assurance agencies.

Finally, an initiative has been taken to establish a forum for cooperation on the internal quality assurance of the ENQA member agencies. One purpose of this IQA network is to discuss relevant interpretations of the European Standards and Guidelines as regards accountability procedures of agencies. The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) is the initiator and will host the first meeting of the network in April 2007.
1. **Introduction**

The increased focus on quality assurance of higher education over the last 15 years and the role of external quality assurance agencies (EQAs) in that regard has led to a request from governments and higher education institutions for EQAs to be subject to systematic review primarily in order to ensure that the agencies undertake sound evaluation processes and as a means of identifying credible agencies. The paper will provide an overview of the discussions of the introduction of external reviews of EQAs based on internationally agreed external quality criteria and it discusses the value of these criteria when applied in reviews of EQAs.

Both authors have been involved in reviews of EQAs while holding managerial positions both before and after the introduction of the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) for EQAs and they have also participated as reviewers of EQAs.

2. **External reviews prior to 2000**

EQAs have always been subject to various checks from the authorities in the country where they operate depending on their legal status and their funding arrangements. Government funded EQAs undergo financial audit and/or legal audit, EQAs typically have to comply with specialised legislation for example in regard to human resources management and occupational health and safety legislation, and they are required to submit annual reports.

Until around 2000 only a small number of EQAs had undergone an external fitness for purpose review of the same kind that many higher education institutions undergo. These included the Academic Audit Unit in New Zealand (NZUAAU) and the Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency in Hannover (ZEVA). These two reviews were organised at the initiative of the Boards of these agencies to provide feedback on the appropriateness of their processes and the extent to which they were achieving their objectives. The Danish Centre for Evaluation (now the Danish Evaluation Institute) in 1998 underwent a review initiated by the Danish Ministry of Education at the end of the Centre’s first seven years of existence to learn from the experiences gained from external review of higher education programs and to decide on the future external, national quality assurance arrangements. The Hungarian Accreditation Council (HAC) underwent review as part of a World Bank project.

The exception from these ad hoc initiated reviews were the accreditation agencies in the US which regularly have had to undergo external review by the US Department for Education as a requirement for federal funding and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) offers external reviews as a service for its members.
The late 90s marked a change in the discussion about the need for external checks of EQAAs and introduced pre-defined criteria as a starting point for the review.

3. Development of External Criteria for External Review of EQAAs

The discussion of the need for the introduction of systematic and regular external reviews of EQAAs has taken considerable pace since 1999 for a number of reasons. The discussion to develop a set of guidelines of good practice for external quality assurance agencies as a possible platform for assessing the work of EQAAs was first launched at the INQAAHE biennial conference in Chile in 1999. The initial proposal from the then board was to develop a ‘Quality Hallmark’ for quality assurance agencies. Following this initial discussion a working group was established to explore suitable approaches which would allow an external quality assurance agency to continuously improve the quality of its activities and to be able to provide proof of its quality to stakeholders. Simultaneously the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP) approached the INQAAHE board with a proposal to establish an accreditation system for EQAAs. This proposal was endorsed by the INQAAHE board and presented to and discussed with the members at the 2002 INQAAHE workshop in Jamaica. The proposal did not receive broad support and it was instead agreed to develop a set of Principles of Good Practice. These principles (later renamed Guidelines of Good Practice) were endorsed by the INQAAHE membership in 2003 and finally agreed in 2005 at the INQAAHE General Assembly in Wellington. The main purpose of the Guidelines is to promote good practice and assist an EQAA in improving its quality, building on existing experiences. Compliance with the guidelines is not linked to the application for membership of INQAAHE. Since then at least three EQAAs have undergone external review against the GGP (CNAP Chile in 2005, AUQA Australia in 2006, HEQC South Africa, ongoing) and other agencies have used them for internal review.

In 2003 in Berlin the European Ministers of Education committed themselves to supporting the further development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level through mutually shared criteria and methodologies for quality assurance and they ‘called upon ENQA through its members, in co-operation with the EUA, EURASHE AND ESIB, to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies...’1. This decision led to the development of the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESP)2 which were approved by the ministers in Bergen in 2005. The purpose of the ESP is to provide a source of assistance and guidance to both higher education institutions and EQAAs in developing their own quality assurance systems. The ESP report (p29) also recommended any European agency should at no more than five yearly intervals be subject to external review of its processes and activities. This proposal was translated into a requirement for membership of ENQA3.

INQAAHE and ENQA are not the only bodies which have developed criteria of good practice or Codes of Practices for their members. An analysis presented by Dr Guy Alterman in May 20064, included criteria developed by six networks of quality assurance agencies and international organisations. Despite the objectives of the networks included in the study being different, the analysis concluded that, these criteria share more similarities than differences: ‘the comparability of QA standards of several quality assurance agency networks is relatively high provided that:...’
There is room for diversity
There is mutual trust
Networks are operating within a framework with clear and verifiable agreements’.

The rest of the paper will refer to the ESP and in particular to the INQAAHE GGP, however.

4. **The role of guidelines**

As mentioned above the objectives of INQAAHE and ENQA and the purposes for developing criteria of good practice are also slightly different. The INQAAHE GGP were developed to raise the credibility of the profession whereas the ESG were also developed to achieve comparability in practices and processes across a diverse continent to facilitate the achievement of the European Higher Education Area. As the principles embedded within the ESP form the basis for the ENQA criteria for ‘Full Membership’, membership of ENQA signals compliance with the ESP and thus the agency’s credibility in that regard.

At the same time it is important to keep in mind that any EQAA has specific purposes, which are influenced by the national, cultural and institutional context in which the EQAA operates. The existence of guidelines does not change these purposes. The critical question therefore is what functions the guidelines serve in practice. The authors have identified the following functions of guidelines. They:

- Specify professional requirements for EQAAs
- Lead to consistency of interpretation of good practice for EQAAs between different stakeholders, organisations and agents
- Offer an interpretation of esoteric or inaccessible information for practical use
- Summarise the thinking around a particular issue
- Reassure users that appropriate procedures are being used
- Set aspirational targets for new EQAAs
- Increase transparency of operations

All guidelines must be interpreted intelligently and with attention to their purpose and meaning as well as the context in which they are being used.

5. **Impact of the GGP on review**

As stated above the last decade has witnessed an emerging review culture for EQAAs based on external reference points. The development of criteria of good practices and processes for external review of EQAAs has been driven by the networks of quality assurance agencies in consultation with the major stakeholders in higher education, ie governments and higher education institutions. External reference points are not a prerequisite for review of agencies, however. As the reviews in the late 90s show ‘fitness for purpose’ reviews against the agencies’ objectives are also valuable. The external reference points add an important dimension to a review.
They have introduced:

- a suitable approach to review
The GGP provides a framework for the self evaluation process and the preparation of the self evaluation report and thus facilitates the self evaluation process.

- clearer expectations of EQAA when reviewed
The GGP offer an outline for the minimum expectations and requirements of the agency.

- a platform for reviewers from which to provide feedback due to the joint starting point.
Given that the criteria provide clearer expectation of the EQAA in terms of the starting point for the review, the criteria also offers a clear platform for reviewers to provide feedback. The feedback is no longer restricted to be done against the EQAA’s own objectives, which in the case of many agencies are quite broad and not related to the agency’s processes or benchmarked against practices in place in the reviewers’ organisations which may not always be appropriate in other contexts.

- increased accountability and transparency in accountability not least internationally
In an internationalised higher education environment where courses and degrees are no longer restricted within national boundaries, it is necessary for QA agencies to have international credibility. Achievement by an agency of its own objectives is not necessarily sufficient to ensure international acceptability of the agency’s work. This is not primarily out of a fear that the objectives are not sufficiently ambitious, but that they are nation-specific and therefore do not necessarily apply effectively in an international context. Other countries may be interested to know that an EQAA is doing what its government wants, but that does not guarantee it is doing what other countries/agencies may want it to do.

- a higher level of comparability between agencies which increases the possibility of recognition of each other’s work.
Achievement of a common set of objectives establishes a level of comparability between EQAA and opens the possibility of making use of each other’s works and even recognising each other’s judgements as expressed in the review reports of higher education institutions. If these common objectives are internationally agreed, they should have an added level of credibility. By analogy one may consider a quality audit of an institution against its objectives. Achievement of these objectives may be of interest to other institutions, but they may think the objectives i. too low level to be credible, and/or ii. too different to have any value for student transfer. Conversely, quality audit against external reference points may better establish credibility and comparability or on the contrary make it evident that such comparability does not exist. The same is true for agency review against external objectives.

- Increased focus on a need for continuous internal quality assurance
The GGP have not only had an impact on the way external reviews are organised. They have had an equally important role in emphasising the need for EQAA to develop internal quality assurance mechanisms, such as mechanisms for obtaining
regular feedback from their stakeholders and those involved in their review processes, ie the higher education institutions and peer reviewers.

As stated above, the GGP are recent examples of external criteria for EQAA practices. Having applied the GGP in practice in a case study of AUQA’s practices as part of the development of the GGP, in the external review of AUQA in 2006, and in the external review of CNAP in 2005, four questions remain, ie

- Could they be more ambitious?

Would it be of more value to the EQAAs if the GGP were more ambitious and challenging to comply with? Could they be used more effectively to improve the practices if they offered advice at a higher level of detail rather than at a more general level? The GGP could for example be strengthened if EQAAs were expected to provide specific data as evidence that they are complying with the GGP. In regard to GGP 2: The Relation between the EQA Agency and the higher education institutions, point 4: The EQA Agency aims to contribute to both quality improvement and accountability, the strengthened principle would then be that: ‘The EQAA can provide evidence that it contributes to the quality improvement and accountability of the higher education sector in the country where it operates’.

- Could they lead to unhelpful conformity of practice and restrict development of the practices applied?

On the other hand, a downside to more prescriptive and detailed criteria is that they could lead to an unwanted level of conformity of practices and not leaving the EQAA sufficient room to develop new practices. Just as EQAAs expect and check higher education institutions’ ability to continuously improve their activities, it is important that EQAA are geared to continuously assess the quality of their own work and improve this as appropriate and possible within the context they are working.

- Do they allow for national characteristics to be taken into consideration – and if yes does that reduce the international value?

As mentioned previously, achievement by an agency of its own objectives is not necessarily sufficient to ensure international credibility. At the same time it is necessary that the criteria allow for national characteristic, e.g. some national legislation does not allow publication of certain kinds of information or in some cases the mission statement of an agency due to and/or political reasons may specify that the primary responsibility of the agency is to contribute to accountability of higher education and not quality improvement. This on the other hand would not necessarily exclude the possibility that the agency’s processes do also support quality enhancement, however. This is a parameter which is outside the agency’s control and should be considered as national special case.

- Are they too open to interpretation?

Some of the formulations of some of the guidelines are open for interpretation. As mentioned above, it is not necessarily a disadvantage that the guidelines allow for different levels of achievement to make them a valuable tool for newly established and more mature agencies alike. It is a problem, however, if the formulations are so open that different panels of reviewers may come to very different conclusions on the same criteria. An example where that could have important effects on the
judgement of the practices of an agency is in relation to GGP 3: Decision-making and the independence of an agency. The GGP suggests that ‘An EQA Agency is independent to the extent that it has autonomous responsibility for its operations and that the judgements made in its reports cannot be influenced by third parties’. The question that could be asked in this regard is whether the Agency Council that makes the accreditation decisions on the basis of the reports organised by the agency is a third party or part of the agency and in the latter case therefore in a position to make changes to the reports?

Conclusion
Despite these issues addressed above in relation to the GGP, we believe that the emergence of criteria or internationally agreed external reference points for EQAA’s good practices has brought EQAAs an important step forward in contributing to their own continuous improvement, increasing the accountability and transparency vis-a-vis the main stakeholders and enabling a higher degree of sharing of good practices and use of each other’s work. The quality assurance bodies around the world now have to continue to consider how the quality of their work including the criteria for good practices can be improved.

In summary the GGP for agencies could be compared to accreditation criteria for institutions on several dimensions:

- if they are compulsory, they ensure a specified threshold
- if they are voluntary, they may be used i. superficially, or ii. effectively.
- achievement by an agency sends signals to other agencies of i. trustworthiness, and ii. potential for mutual recognition.

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1 Realising the European Higher Education Area, Communique of Ministers responsible for Higher Education in Berlin on 19 September 2003, p 4.
1. Introduction

The Kuwaiti government has recently taken fundamental steps in facilitating private higher education. In early 2000 the Kuwaiti National Assembly passed what is known as law 34/2000 for Private Universities in the country. Immediately thereafter, the Ministry of Higher Education (MHE) formed a special committee formed of senior expertise in the filed of higher education to propose the executive bylaws. A proposal for organizing the private universities in Kuwait was put forward to the Minister of High Education and. An open meeting comprising various representatives of the public and the private sectors of the Kuwaiti community was organized and presented with the proposed bylaws to be discussed. At that meeting, the final version of the executive bylaws was drafted for approval. It was only October 2000, and the executive bylaws were passed by the Kuwaiti’s council of ministers. It is also worth noting that it was the executive office which put together the procedures and regulations for licensing and accrediting private institution.

The following discussion will cast light on the evolution of Private higher education in Kuwait, the legal framework and executive bylaws of private university at Kuwait. Particularly, we will present, herewith in some detail, the formation of the Private University’s Council (PUC), policies adopted for licensing private institutions; criteria for evaluating the proposed institution, such as: the proposed mission for the institution, administration, teaching staff, facilities, student and financial affairs. In addition, quality assurance and other key success factors shall be outlined.
2- Chronological Development

2.1 The seeding phase: The evolution of private higher education in Kuwait began with interest from the private sector which formalized at least three groups that demanded licensure prior to the government action. Intellectual efforts that contributed to the awareness of society needs were also taking place in Kuwait University. The project titled "Establishments of Community Colleges in Kuwait" provided evidence of demand exceeding supply and suggested governance options using feasibilities study and Delphi type surveys (1). The policy makers encouraged the government to act and an executive office was initiated in 1999. A law was then drafted and passed in July 2000 by the lawmakers as law 34/2000 for the establishment of private universities (2). Another executive office was formed for drafting the executive bylaws for implementation and the council of ministers granted approval in January 2001. The minister of higher education acted soon and the governing body, the Private Universities Council (PUC) was formed in May 2001 (3). The council set out to work immediately, with the assistance of the executive committee who drafted the original bylaws and proceeded with approving the licensure guidelines and procedure in July 2001. Several applications were received and the first application obtained license was given for The Gulf University for Science and Technology in July 2002 (4). The license is issued by the highest authority in the country i.e. the Emir himself. Other parallel development was taking place at the same time which was the selection of the State of Kuwait to house the Arab Open University, a pan Arab project supported by the UNESCO and Gulf Countries governments under academic guidance from the British Open University. This was actually inacted by law 31/2002 (5) and operation immediately commenced late in Oct. 2002. This Arab Open University (AOU) has branches in several Arab countries, and Kuwait Branch was adopted under the PUC umbrella in January 2004, via a ministerial decree (6).

This systematic chronology illustrates the speed of development and government commitment for this new economic sector in Kuwait, taking into consideration that the education minister seat was rotated twice from 2000 to 2003.

2.2 The bandwagon effect: the private university office received upward of 50 petitions to open private universities, junior colleges and branch campuses in the period from 2001 to 2003. Out of these around 16 applications were turned in but only 5 licenses were granted by the end of 2003. They were two vocational colleges, two universities and one MBA school in addition to AOU. Four more licenses were granted by the end of 2005. The license requires international affiliation with qualified universities or colleges. Most are with American schools, two with Australian TAFE institutes (one foreign branch and one with articulation agreement) and the MBA college is a branch from Maastricht school of business from Holland. The Arab Open University is affiliated with the British OU with a joint degree agreement.

By March 2007 we still have the same number of 10 licenses. Six of these are operational, with students in excess of 10000. For comparison purpose, consider that the first public university in Kuwait, Kuwait University commenced operation in 1966 and has now a population of almost 20000. The other four licenses are either in construction or seeking construction permits.

2.3 Internal Organization: the administrative processes that took place so far can be classified into three categories; internal organization, regulatory orders and supporting activities. The internal organization started with the PUC formation. This
was followed later by the replacement of the executive office with a general secretariat in July 2002 to provide implementation support for the council (7). The council also formed two committees in Dec. 2002: the licensing committee and the accreditation committee (8). The general secretariat was temporarily managed by the former director of the executive office till a general secretary was formally appointed by the Emir as a deputy minister in Nov. 2003 (9). The general secretariat was commissioned to follow implementation of the PUC decrees but had no formal executive power till Nov. 2006 when the Council of Ministers formally recognized it as the sole executive arm to the PUC and provided it with administrative and financial authorities (10). As for the PUC itself two more committees were formed in 2005: the internal scholarship committee and the research and development committee (11). The functions of these latter committees will be discussed later.

2.4 Regulatory Orders: Soon after the PUC commenced operations, it started putting together a comprehensive package of guidelines for the perspective license seekers. The package was designed to ensure transparency of the process as well as smoothness and quality assurance. A noteworthy component of the package is the policy statement of the PUC which highlights the goals and objectives of the PUC from licensing HE institutions. The mechanics of application registration and review is also included to ensure uniformity of treatment. Of special interest is the guidelines set forth for preparation of market and feasibility study and building/facility standards for cost estimation. Furthermore, the qualified list of accepted international institutions for branch campuses, articulation and affiliation is also included as well as the minimum expectations in the affiliation agreement.

As for the accreditation process, an innovative process and was developed between the years 2002-2004 after considerable research and brainstorming. These will be explained briefly later in this paper. The scope of PUC authority is so comprehensive that it is not possible to provide details of all activities within regulations. But we should mention briefly that rules and guidelines for transcript/degree endorsement, internal scholarship and research and professional developments were all developed and implemented.

2.5 Supporting Activities: the establishment of private universities would not have been possible without co-operation from other government agencies/authorities. On the top of the list would be the land grant facility that was awarded to PUC in the year 2002 from the municipality. After considerable effort and considerations, six lots were awarded in the six governorates in Kuwait, each measuring 150000 m2 (12). The ministry of Education also awarded three lots of existing schools to be remodeled for university purposes. Housing universities in these lots was no trivial affair, requiring considerable permits and approvals from different departments. However, with subsidized rent that was approved by the concerned authorities, it was worth the effort. Another important facility available for institutions is the financial offset program enabled by the ministry of finance. This program requires that foreign contractors reinvest part of their profit in the country in certain developmental projects. Several schools benefited from this program considering that a high multiple was applied for educational projects to offset the obligation. These facilities proved very effective in managing the cost of establishing the schools. The third noteworthy facility was internal scholarships which were activated Sept. 2006. Although it was designed and orchestrated within the PUC, success of the program would not have been possible without the HE ministers support and co-operation from the ministry of Finance and the members of the parliament. This program underpins the desire of
PUC to pursue business model of Public Private Partnership. The government would secure 80% of the scholarship for qualified students and the institution would subsidize the other 20%. The process was implemented in a co-operative decentralized manner such that institutions advertise for the scholarships after the rules and procedures are set by PUC (13). The students apply within each institution and independent reviewers screen the applications and raise it to PUC secretariat. Over 1000 student benefited from this scheme. Most important consideration was to provide equity for low income families to enroll their children in private higher institutions and maintain social coherence.

3. Private University Council (PUC)

The Private Universities Council (PUC) is an independent organization composed of eight members in addition to its chair; the Minister of Higher Education. The PUC memberships, who are appointed by the Council of Ministers upon the recommendation of the Minister of Higher Education, are specialists possessing a wide range of experience and commitment to the field of higher education. Those members shall not be involved, direct or indirect, in the business of running private education throughout the period of their membership.

The PUC fulfills the following missions (14):

- Decides on the establishment of a private institution.
- Determines the requirements of the academic credibility of the private institution, and constantly apply quality and control measures to insure full compliance with the proved terms and conditions in the decree of establishing. It also applies quality and control measure on the approved programs of study.
- Adopts universal standards while approving programs of study, and frequently reassesses these standards for the better of performance and higher quality of higher education.
- Regulates measures of accreditation, accredits institutions and their programs, and validates degrees and certificates issued from private institutions, and equates them with their counterparts according to the approved procedures and regulations.
- Looks into cases where the activities of a private institution are to be adjourned, combined and/or cancelled.
- Looks into further issues of concerned as referred by the Minister of Higher Education.
The following diagram outlines the PUC and its active organizational Structure.

![Diagram of PUC Organizational Structure]

**Figure (1):** PUC Organizational structure.
4. Licensing Procedure:

Proposals for new private institutions are put forward to a designated committee (proposal-study committee). Based on careful examination of various parts of the proposed institution, the committee recommends dismissal, approval, or sometimes resubmissions. The licensing procedure takes basically two turns. Initially, a preliminary application will be put forward for preliminary review. If tentative approval is issued, then, the procedure will be supplemented with a detailed application. As the licensing procedure will be highlighted in figure 2, it is worth mentioning here with a brief description of the anticipated content of each stage.
Figure 2: Licensing process
4.1 Phase I: Preliminary Application.

The preliminary application will include the following details (15):

- Name of institution.
- Mission and objectives of the institution accompanied with the institution’s administrative system and its source of fund. This will be accompanied with a signed statement of the founders to rule out other objectives contradicting the institution’s statement of mission and aims.
- Names of founders whether individuals, groups, or otherwise, and their detailed CVs.
- Affiliation with other institutions, or other bodies involved in the funding.
- Resources (both: human and materials) available for the establishment of the private institution.
- Financial assets allotted whether cash or otherwise, and shares distribution of the founders.
- Detailed technical and economic feasibility study.
- The institution’s proposed structure.
- Regulations governing: policy of enrolment, academic requirements, study fees and scholarships.
- Terms of study, examination, awarding of degrees, certificates and diplomas, accompanied with the pre-approved programs of study by the affiliate international institution, if any.
- Programmed plan of institutional and program accreditation.
- Names of proposed First Council of Trustee and their CVs.
- The proposed dates for commencement of study.

The proposal-study committee will look into the abovementioned detail, and thoroughly examine the content of the preliminary application to assess to what degree the application meets conditions and standards set by the PUC. In particular, the assessment at this stage will be chiefly concerned with the statement of the proposed institution and to what degree it serves the objectives of high education in the country, and if so, does the proposed institution possess the material and human resources to achieve its mission. If these concerns are positively answered, then the committee recommends the concerned institution for initial approval, and a decree to that effect will be issued by the PUC. At this stage, the concerned institution proceeds to file-in a detailed application.
4.2 Phase II: Detailed application

Within one year from date of the approval of the initial application, the founders should submit the following documents (16):

- A detailed plan of the buildings, including facilities such as: study and research halls, libraries, labs, appliances and student activity’s services and management buildings and service. Such plan must be drawn on the basis of the approved standards of efficiency by the PUC. The planned drawings should be approved by a certified engineer and in compliance the universal rating.

- Financial statement of guarantee to insure the availability of the said fund for execution of the project. This statement must be approved by PUC.

- Within six months of the submission of detailed application, the PUC will answer back to the founders of the decision made on their proposal, either to submit further document, or the final approval. Upon PUC recommendation, the Council of Ministers will issue the decree to establish the private institution.

It is worth mentioning here that the private institution may not commence its activity prior to proper establishment of its required material and human resources, and a written approval by the PUC.

5. Accreditation Criteria and Procedure:

PUC requires every licensed institution to go through institutional and academic-program accreditation. Institutional accreditation is carried by an independent external team formed by PUC. Program accreditation is carried by internationally recognized accreditation body in the program field of specialization.

The institutional accreditation criteria are described by the executive PUC bylaws as follows:

**Mission:**

Private university shall aim to contribute to achieving the goals of higher education and applied education in the country in a manner that provides research service and serves the goals and the needs of the developing society.

**Management:**

The Decree for establishing the private institution will explicitly state its legal status, form of organization, colleges and institutes, the Council of Trustees, and its financial resources. In addition, it states the degrees granted and conditions for obtaining these degrees.

From date of the decree, the private institution shall enjoy an independent legal status, and will be legally presented by its chairman to practice the rights to obtain various types of funds, to be part of financial contracts, and to accept donations.

Council of trustees of the private institution is the highest authority therein and it shall look after its interests, sets its general policy, manages its execution. In particular, it shall carry the following responsibilities:
• approves the internal regulations
• manages its funds
• elects its chairman and other key figures
• Upon permission from the PUC and the standards determined by Council of Ministers, the private institution shall accept donations, grants, gifts and trust fund (waqf) in a manner that shall not contradict its mission and objectives
• appoints the financial auditor, which must be a licensed accountant
• approves the annual balance sheet and financial account.

**Teaching staff:**

The teaching staff at private institutions and/or the branches of foreign universities should be holders of PhD (or equivalent). Full time staff shall not be less than 70% of the total staff.

The appointed teaching staff with PhDs in the private institution shall not be less than two thirds of the teaching staff. Assistants to the teaching staff and their qualifications, titles, and their percentage to the overall teaching staff will be determined by the internal bylaws of the concerned institution with consultation of the PUC.

The internal bylaws and regulations of the private institution shall determine the rules organizing staff contracts, renewals, promotions, system of delegating and secondments, and policy governing evaluation of performance and others of administrative issues.

**Students’ affairs & degrees and certificates**

Students not obtaining a certificate of completing secondary school study or its equivalent may not be enrolled at the private educational institution.

Within the framework of the regulations decided at the decree, the private institution shall establish polices, regulations, conditions and procedures of enrolling students, procedures of following ups, dismissing, re-entering, and graduation, as well as schema of student registration and guidance and other issues concerning student affairs.

**Financial affairs**

Private institution must observe a regular maintenance of its financial resources and keep up-to-date records of its accounts and financial records. Periodical financial statements shall be subject to the approval of one or more licensed auditor whom Council of Trustees shall appoint. Council of trustees must approve the annual financial report of the private institution.
Figure 3: Institutional Accreditation Process
## 6. PUC Business Model—Critical Success Factors (17)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Business Model Feature</th>
<th>PUC Business Model Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long vertical organization</td>
<td>Flat organization (two levels of authority)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority is within individuals</td>
<td>Authority is retained or delegated by council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committees are advisory</td>
<td>Line managers have facilitator/ advisory role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience is not critical in every level</td>
<td>Experience/skill is critical in all levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative employees are majority</td>
<td>Technical employees are majority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4: Organizational Features of PUC**

### 6.1 Flat Organization:

As shown above the PUC adopted organization that is flat. Pertinent to this structure is the retention of power within two levels of hierarchy at maximum thus enabling one step delegation when necessary. This arrangement sown in Figure 5 proved very handy when faced with sudden introduction of a new system like the internal scholarships which was conceived and implemented in 4 weeks. Another important feature is the facilitator role of line managers such that their function is aligned with the rest of the organization.

### 6.2 Networking association:

A critical feature for the PUC is its ability to mobilize, network and utilize available expertise through careful selection, training, qualification and certification of professionals. A technical Committee of Engineers was commissioned to set guidelines for construction and supervise permits and plans. Evaluation teams were mobilized for institutional accreditation support. External experts for feasibility studies were qualified and short listed. International accreditation agencies were short listed and outsourced to fill the expertise gap. It can be said that although PUC is a government agency, its mode of operation resembles that of an association of the private universities, a designation often attached to it by
third parties. In fact, the universities/colleges are comfortable working with PUC secretariat as partner while observing its role as a regulator. PUC also certifies qualified professionals as Certified Educational Institution Auditor (CEIA), a designation that is given to persons who demonstrated substantial institutional quality assurance and accreditation experience, and agreed to the code of conduct set by the PUC. Evaluation teams or auditors are neither employees of PUC nor they are employed by the institutions subject to the audit. They are selected or approved by PUC concerned committees and the institutions and contracted by the institutions. There reporting and compensation is governed by the PUC through the general secretariat. This arrangement ensures independent opinion that is received from these teams, some of which comes from international QA or accreditation agencies. This trilateral arrangement is a cornerstone for PUC business model and is shown in Figure 5.

6.3 The Regulatory Model: the regulatory model follows a standard feedback control system arrangement as shown in Figure 6. The target or OBJECTIVE for the institutions is to be globally competent. This is measured with a reference point of the global 200 universities listed by the Times Higher Education Supplement or equivalent. The PUC monitors and observes the gap that exists and put forward
policies and control tools to achieve the desired target of quality. After considerable brainstorming and analysis, these tools or control actions were grouped into four interactive main domains:

- license standards
- performance audits and accreditation
- scholarship system
- research and development system

PUC view these tools as critical to the success of private universities sector. Quality assurance is considered to be dependent on the implementation of these tools by the institutions. The General Secretariat acts as a final control element, communicator and gatekeeper for the execution of the regulatory system are large. The executive power given to the general secretariat in Nov. 2006 ensures the sustainability of its designated function.

It is important to note that these tools are implemented in parallel as much as practical and not be considered as sequential, although their historical evolution may suggest so. That is to say for example, providing scholarship seats for institutions is not regarded as reward for achieving some performance target. It is part of the system that aims to achieve quality of performance. In a different context, we view scholarships as a means to achieve social equity and justice for the community as well as a means to provide the institutions with qualified intake of students. The incentive is then applied for institutions which achieved certain performance by controlling the number of seats available for scholarships.
6.4 Expertise retention and Expansion: a final word on expertise cannot be overestimated. The team who drafted the original bylaws of law 34/2000 came from the leading intellectual institutions in the country. Out of 9 original members, 7 were sustained thus far within the PUC organisation. The members of Private Universities Council are prominent business and academic intellectuals. Six of the original founding members of PUC are still serving.

The council took the policy of careful expansion of expertise by seeking new participants in the evaluation teams and in the general secretariat whether they would be administrative, academic, engineering, financial or legal. Certification of auditors is adopted as a means for recognition and credibility enhancement.

The PUC bylaws allowed for investor education and transfer of knowledge through the commenting facility during second round of license application. This proved to be extremely valuable for dialog and quality enhancement, especially because the whole affair is new to the investment community in Kuwait. The PUC with its sustainable base was thus able to sustain the fairly quick rotation of ministerial seats, but not without the renewed commitment of the various four education ministers who served from 2000 till 2007.
7. The outcome

7.1: the response of Kuwaiti community to the law establishing private institutions was overwhelming. Over 30 applications for establishing private higher institutions were received. There were some factors in favor of private institutions in Kuwait:

- Specialized institutional accreditation.
- Mandatory international affiliation.
- Mandatory Program accreditation.
- International campus design standards.
- Little political interference.
- Training, research, development and business incubators encouraged.
- Give priority to job market demand

7.2: as mentioned before, ten decrees have been issued to license private higher institutions. Five private institutions have already commenced their activities. Table (1) below lists the approved areas of study in these institutions.

Four private institutions in Kuwait are branches of internationally accredited institutions, and six institutions have affiliation agreement with internationally accredited institutions. Table (2) below summarizes the international partnership of the licensed institutions.

As of 2006/2007 academic year over 10,000 students are enrolled in private institutions. Table (3) lists the number of enrolled and graduated students for each institution. Table (4) provides the statistics of internal scholarships. The approved student capacity is 18,000 and the projected capacity by year 2025 is 60,000 students.

All operating institutions have been awarded the institutional accreditation by PUC, obtained positive quality assurance assessment from their international partners. Three academic programs were suspended following an accreditation exercise in one institution for two institutions received warning for operating few academic programs without license. This later proved to be misinterpretation of the license scope and the institutions filed these programs for approval with PUC which was granted. One institution obtained international program accreditation (Kuwait Maastricht MBA program from AMBA). Three institutions awarded their students foreign degrees through their articulation agreements: ACK from TAFE institutes, AOU from OU and KMBS from its mother Maastricht Business School.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diploma</th>
<th>Bachelor</th>
<th>Master</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maritime engineering</td>
<td>English language</td>
<td>General &amp; strategic management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management and business administration</td>
<td>Communication &amp; media studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information science &amp; technology</td>
<td>social sciences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering &amp; design technology</td>
<td>Hospitality and tourism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>Environmental study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health science</td>
<td>safety science</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Management and business administration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Computer science</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medical and Health science</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information science &amp; technology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (1): licensed fields of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Affiliated/Branch Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Licensed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States of America</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (2): International Partnership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enrolled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOU</td>
<td>6293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUST</td>
<td>1699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KMBS</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUK</td>
<td>1162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACK</td>
<td>1084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10570</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (3): Number of enrolled and graduated students as of 2005/2006 academic year.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AOU</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUST</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KMBS</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUK</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACK</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1086</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (4): Number of internal scholarship students as of 2005/2006 academic year.

Notes and literature cited:

4- Emiri Decree # 156/2002” License for Establishment of Gulf University for Science and Technology” 21 July 2002.
5- Law 31/2002 for the agreement of site to establish Arab Open University between Kuwaiti government and Gulf Program to support united nations development foundations.
8- The committee for licensing “Applications Review”, and the “accreditation committee” were include in the ministerial decree # 101. Their formation was issued later in Dec. 2002. by ministerial decrees 242 and 241.
10- Decree # 1179/2006 “amendment of article # 30 to the bylaws of Private Universities law. Issued by Council of Ministers, 19 Nov. 2006.
11- Ministerial Decree # 132” Committee for Internal Scholarships” Minister of Higher Education. 11 May 2005. Also Ministerial Decree # 146 “Research and Development Committee” 23 May 2005.
12- Municipal Council Decree # MB/TR/15/1/2002 “The approval of request by ministry of higher education to allocate lots for the establishment of private universities in different areas of Kuwait with size of 150000 m2 each.” 29 July 2002.
13- The internal scholarship policies were approved in PUC meeting # 24 by decree # MJKh 4/24-1/2006. 1st March 2006. The budget for the
same was realized in May 2006. The implementation plan for 1068 scholarships were approved in PUC meeting # 25, decree # MJKh 5/25-2/2006, with delegation of supervisory scholarships committee to complete all arrangements.

15- Ibid. Articles 5-8.
17- This business model was presented by Prof. Imad Alatiqi, the Secretary General to the PUC meeting # 19 in Document MJKh 9/19-4/2004 appendix. It was endorsed in the next meeting by decree # MJKh 7/20-1/2005, 20 March 2005.

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A cursory examination of the INQAAHE membership shows that it is wide-ranging in terms of geography and higher education traditions of which the various members are a part, as well as the overall cultural contexts in which the member-bodies are located. The differences in cultural contents according to Woodhouse (1984) are largely responsible for the differences in Quality Assurance (QA) practice internationally.

The genesis of QA, in terms of the driving forces behind its establishment, differs from country to country. The history of accreditation in the United States, for example, shows that the American higher education institutions themselves played a significant and defining role in shaping external review practice in that country. This leadership role on the part of the institution, is said to be rooted in American notions of democracy and the sovereign right to citizens to govern themselves. Whether one agrees with this view or not, few in the QA area would fail to recognise the characteristic of American accreditation. Examination of other national systems as well reveal particular characteristics.

While all QA bodies have a great deal in common, it is common knowledge that country differences have an impact on legitimacy and efficiency in real world situations. Hopkin (2004) has adopted the term “frame factors” to facilitate understanding of the many interrelated factors and considerations that underlie perceptions of quality and consequently legitimacy and efficiency.

The Impact of Frame Factors on Quality Assurance Practice
While there is general agreement on the core principles of QA, in order to ensure that it effectively meets the needs of its multiple stakeholders in “emerging” and “embryonic” higher education systems such as Trinidad and Tobago’s, due attention must be paid to factors such as the level of development of the tertiary system. At the centre of this development are critical issues such as governance, systemic, academic, technical and administrative foundation and capacity as well a policy coherence in the higher education sector.

In Trinidad and Tobago, many tertiary institutions are under-resourced and lack the fundamental infrastructure necessary for supporting quality education. This has resulted in an overall slowness in the real ‘professionalisation’ of higher education and has also retarded the ‘professionalisation’ of significant stakeholders such as the higher education institutions themselves as well as the very agency responsible for higher education at the national level. This has resulted in a state of affairs in which a QA agenda is being advanced without the institutions being at the centre of the QA thrust.

In attempting to fully understand the QA challenges facing Trinidad and Tobago and the rest of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), it is important to note that the QA imperative as it relates to specialised programmes such as engineering and medicine has traditionally been addressed outside a broader institutional QA framework. In fact, it can be argued that the external review of the aforementioned programmes at the University of the West Indies (UWI) if it can be said to constitute a QA tradition of sorts, has had at best only minimal
input on current efforts at quality improvement in higher education in Trinidad and Tobago and the rest of the region.

In the frame factor concept, higher education systems can be categorised in terms of “mature”, “evolving” or “embryonic”. These categories and the tentative taxonomy of which they are a part (Table 1) can be a useful “analytical and objective framework” which can be of assistance to countries such as Trinidad and Tobago in their efforts to develop responsive and efficient QA systems. It can also increase understanding of the essential prerequisites for the development and functioning of effective QA systems in support of quality improvement. Such increased understanding is necessary to ensure that a narrow focus on accountability and managerial control do not become the defining elements of quality in Trinidad and Tobago and the strategies adopted to ensure it.

Table 1 – Tentative Taxonomy With Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>DISTINCTIVE FRAME FACTOR</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>• Diverse and extensive HE system</td>
<td>Sweden, Denmark, United States, Australia &amp; United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• HE systems have own agendas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Government role participative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Well entrenched HE system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolving</td>
<td>• Some well established institutions.</td>
<td>India, South Africa, Trinidad &amp; Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Government has a key agenda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Wide qualitative range of HE institutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• External Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAAs) established and status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embryonic</td>
<td>• Limited range of HE institutions</td>
<td>Botswana, Guyana, Oman &amp; Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Government has a hegemonic role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• EQAAs relatively new</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mushrooming private sector</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The paper will describe and analyse the critical factors that shape QA practice in Trinidad and Tobago using the frame factors taxonomy as a basis for meaningfully addressing the challenges of legitimacy and efficiency in QA. This is to ensure that QA adds real value to the imperative of improving the quality of higher education.
Abstract

Quality Assurance (QA) models, because of the seeming similarities in their core characteristics may lead to a ‘one size fits all’ approach to the efforts to develop a quality culture in emerging higher education systems. The ready availability of QA standards and procedures which can be adapted to country specific contexts tends to contribute to simplification of some of the critical prerequisites for the development and improvement of quality education in countries such as Trinidad and Tobago.

The fledgling nature of higher education itself; the de facto power exercised by bodies external to the QA agency and the institutions themselves; policy ambiguity as well as capacity issues are all factors which manifest themselves in ways that pose serious challenges to legitimacy and efficiency.

This paper aims to address these interrelated factors in the Trinidad and Tobago context using as an analytical framework, the “Frame Factors” concept.
Introduction

Traditional education normally defines quality in terms of inputs (e.g., physical facilities, laboratories, number of computer units, library, etc.) and processes (e.g., teaching methods, admission of students, contact hours, testing, etc.). Progressive educational systems, on the other hand, define quality in terms of outputs.

This paper examines these two prevailing practices in quality assurance (or accreditation): firstly, focusing the assessment on inputs and processes, and secondly, on outputs. More specifically, it attempts to:

1. show the limitations of defining quality in terms of inputs and processes;
2. demonstrate the need to shift to the assessment of outputs;
3. point out that quality assurance is significantly rendered more relevant and effective using qualifications framework which sets the competence levels, and their respective descriptors, as the outputs of education; and
4. finally, learning from the problems of implementation encountered by the countries that have developed the qualifications framework in the later decades of the 20th century, suggest an incremental approach as a viable strategy especially under a given country setting, in this case, the Philippines.

The reader is informed that while the schema of this study may be generally applicable, its reference is limited to accreditation (used synonymously here with quality assurance), in Philippine setting, which is by program.
Quality Defined in Terms of Inputs

As pointed out earlier, quality may be defined in terms of inputs and processes. In this system, students are advanced upon completion of the requirements of the curriculum, and usually involving a defined period of time of schooling. The graduates are supposed to qualify to engage in learning experiences at a higher level of education, e.g., from basic to tertiary. In many countries, they speak of high graduation rates but do not refer to graduates with inadequate qualifications.

An approach to the evaluation of the quality of education is the accreditation of programs. In a traditional educational systems, quality is determined by evaluating the inputs which are defined in nine to ten criteria, namely: 1) vision, mission, goals and objectives, which are evaluated but not factored in the computation of the general program rating; 2) faculty (teaching force), 3) curriculum and instruction, 4) support to students, 5) research, 6) extension and community relations, 7) library and other learning resources, 8) site and physical facilities, 9) laboratories, and 10) leadership and management (AACCUP, 2006).

If the unit of measurement is the institution, the criteria used in the evaluation include: 1) governance and management, 2) academic standards, 3) research, 4) academic staffing 5) support to students 6) community relations 7) management of resources, and, 8) income generation.

Standards are identified under each criterion, and the provisions are evaluated quantitatively, as to their adequacy; and qualitatively, as to their effectiveness. Since accreditation is recognized as aiming toward improvement in quality, the standards adopted by the accrediting agencies are higher than the minimum requirements set by the government.

Quality Defined In Terms of Outputs

Introducing Qualifications Frameworks

The earlier section pointed out that traditional education normally defines quality in terms inputs. Progressive educational systems, on the other hand, define quality in terms of outputs, i.e., what the students have learned, such as, skills, knowledge and desired attributes that they can use to qualify them to do certain tasks on their own; Accreditation can shift to outputs as the unit of measurement in determining quality.

The introduction of qualifications framework in the educational scenery is a timely phenomenon in this shift to measure outputs. The development of the national qualifications framework in the 1990s had their origins in the neo-liberal economic policies of the 1980s and early 1990s, which were particularly dominant in the U.K. and New Zealand (APQN Project Team, 2007). The development of the qualifications framework were motivated by certain interests created during the last two decades. As identified by Michael Young, these concerns included:
1. the desire to allow qualifications to be determined by workplace performance. It emphasized the need to set learning and education objectives in terms of demonstrable outputs;
2. the growing interest in life-long learning;
3. the intention for adult-learners, particularly those who have dropped out of formal education before the age 16 (as in U.K.), to be able to accumulate credits to attain a qualification;
4. concern in overcoming inequalities by providing accreditation a basis for treating informal training in institutional formal learning; and
5. in Australia (Forsyth, 2007), the desire to integrate and streamline the requirements of participating providers, employers and employees, individuals and interested organizations.

The development of national qualifications framework is a major theme especially in international fora led by the International Labor Organization. Initially, the development of such frameworks was largely restricted to the British Commonwealth countries, such as Scotland, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand (Davies, 2007). It is hotly debated in the European Union Countries. Over the last 20 years this interest has extended to other parts of the world. In the Asia Pacific region, interest in the qualifications framework phenomenon is shown by a study in the “Qualifications Framework in the Asia Pacific Region” commissioned by the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN), an affiliate entity of the INQAAHE.

There are a variety of qualifications systems around the world that have antedated the present national qualifications framework, but differ from the latter.

What then distinguishes an NQF from previous qualifications systems?

The OECD definition of qualifications framework will be helpful in understanding the concept.

A qualifications framework is an instrument for the development and classification of qualification according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. This set of criteria may be implicit in the qualification descriptors themselves or made explicit in the form of a set level descriptors. The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular sector, for example, initial education, adult education and training or an occupational area. Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis whereas others represent a consensus of views of social partners. All qualifications frameworks, however, establish a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications within a country and internationally.
The APQN Project Team suggests that

NQFs:

1. describe qualifications as a single set of criteria, or a single definition of what is to count as a qualification;
2. rank qualifications, usually as a single set of levels with distinct level descriptors;
3. describe vocational qualifications usually in terms of a comprehensive set of accepted fields;
4. describe qualifications in terms of learning outcomes rather than prescribing inputs in terms of syllabus, lengths of teaching time, etc.
5. provide a set of benchmarks against which any learning can be assessed in terms of its potential contribution to qualification; and
6. define qualifications in terms of elements (e.g., units, credits, standards)

Quality Assurance – Qualifications Framework in the Philippines

The Philippines takes pride in its high graduation rates arising from the massification of education, albeit, admits producing graduates with inadequate qualifications. A series of studies on the Philippine educational system conducted in the last 50 years has pointed to the poor and deteriorating quality of education as compared to those of other countries.

This lugubrious state of education has been observed by various study groups and reform bodies, and generally confirmed by practically all sectors of society especially by the users of the products of the educational system. It is understandable then that much premium is given to accreditation as a means of measuring the quality of education, and in promoting reforms among educational providers.

However, something is remiss. While the quality of education is underpinned by the accreditation system which assesses the quality of education programs, the foci of measurement are the inputs which, as observed earlier, define quality. Is it possible then that, accreditation which measures inputs in awarding accredited status to programs, is contributing to the deterioration, rather than to the improvement, of the quality of education in the Philippines. As one critic has remarked: Accreditation has been around in this country half a century ago. But why has education declined when accreditation is supposed to guard and promote quality? What is the accomplishment of the vaunted accreditation system? Old age?

Accreditation in the Philippines is a private undertaking. The government thru the CHED does not accredit. The oversight of higher education programs, including accreditation, is vested in the Commission on Higher Education. In the exercise of its functions, it issues out a series of memorandum-orders which invariably contain the guidelines to be followed in offering curricular programs, such agriculture, civil engineering, teacher education, computer science, etc. These issuances specify the standards on setting objectives, qualifications of faculty, curriculum, including description of the courses, laboratory and
library requirements, physical plant and facilities, etc. for each of the individual programs. Accrediting agencies use standards that are higher than the minimum requirements set by the government for the offering of curricular programs.

Assessment of programs in all government-supported and private colleges and universities is assigned to private accrediting agencies. In sum, quality is assured through accreditation of programs conducted by private (non-government) accrediting agencies. While accreditation is supposed to assess the attainment of the objectives of the institution and of the programs, the criteria of evaluation are input-focused.

The introduction of the national qualifications framework which describes qualifications in terms of learning outcomes can bolster the shift of quality assurance criteria to outputs. It can also argue for the expansion of the unit of measurement from limited pockets of the institution composed of programs, to a comprehensive review of the whole institution in order to gain from the synergism of the approach.

While adoption of the national qualifications framework may be commendable, implementation may be hampered given the following realities.

First, the Philippine National Qualifications Framework is a recent phenomenon, which though formally approved in 2005, its implementation is still under discussion stage and is confined only to the higher education and technical/vocational education sectors.

Second, there is no agreement on a single set of levels in the qualifications structure as is usually required as a distinguishing mark of a national qualifications framework. The two agencies that designed the framework have decided to adopt a 2-track rather than a single hierarchy of levels: one for professional education and another, for technical/vocational education.

Third, the Philippine National Qualifications Framework is not yet quality assured, that has undergone distillation as in the New Zealand framework, and the Hong Kong qualifications framework which is undergoing rigorous review involving many stakeholders (Leung, 2007). A quality assured framework fosters confidence to stakeholders, locally and internationally.

Fourth, is a recognition that a possible shift to quality assurance based on outputs is expected to be resisted by those using the existing practices of evaluating inputs.
Conclusion: QA-QF Nexus

This paper argues for the shift of the definition of quality from input to output orientation. In quality assurance, it would mean a change to assessing outcomes like competencies of graduates rather than assessing the adequacy of the curriculum, physical facilities, number and qualification of faculty, library, etc.

One problem to be faced is the identification of the desired competencies or outcomes, although there are existing qualifications systems in the different countries. The introduction of the phenomenon of national qualifications framework which describes qualifications in terms of outcomes bolsters the move to review the outcomes of education, as a measure of quality of programs or institutions.

At the present stage, implementing the Philippine National Qualifications Framework could meet practical and formidable barriers. In view of the newness of the framework, it suffers from structural defects. It is not yet quality assured. It does not hold the acceptance, not to mention the support, of stakeholders in education, labor, industry and the community. The country might as well be forwarned that the development of the qualifications framework, as experienced in other countries, like, the U. K. and New Zealand, has taken a long time. Even in the European Union, the national qualifications framework is still a live issue.

The experiences of countries that have earlier adopted, or are still in the process of adopting, a qualifications framework would be useful references. Given two general conditions in the Philippines, viz: 1) the still undeveloped national qualifications framework as described earlier, and 2) the deeply rooted system of quality assurance which accredits curricular programs based on the inputs invested in running these programs, can pose barriers to an immediate shift of the focus of quality assurance to outcomes as defined in the qualifications framework.

Thus, in order to attain the objectives of strengthening quality assurance with the qualifications framework, an incremental approach may be adopted beginning with:

1. the introduction of an approach to define quality in terms of outcomes preferably using those defined in the national qualifications framework, or as defined by any existing qualifications system in the country; and
2. to promote the development of the qualifications framework by developing the institution as is done in Singapore (Young, 2005).

This would suggest the adoption of a model of accreditation which expands the scope of measurement from the present use of programs to institutions. To cushion the impact of an abrupt change, the existing practice of program accreditation may continue side by side with institutional accreditation.

The linkage of the functions of qualifications frameworks and quality assurance may be schematically reflected in this manner.
In this scheme, the qualifications framework would define the objectives of education at different levels in the architecture of qualifications. These objectives are used to guide the curricular and learning experiences made available to students by education providers.

Quality assurance will be strengthened by assuring that the competencies defined in the qualifications framework are followed by the education providers, and that the quality of the service is satisfactory and acceptable.
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Theme | Legitimacy and Efficiency of National Systems of Quality Assurance
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Title | Striking a balance between improvement and accountability or ensuring efficiency and impact in a multifaceted field of external quality assurance. Trends and developments in external quality assurance in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark
Presenters | Trine Danø, the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA), Bjørn Stensaker, NIFU-STEP

Abstract
A classic dilemma in external quality assurance is the question of improvement versus accountability. While external quality assurance in the Nordic countries during the 1990s were said to reflect a balance between the two, it can be questioned whether it has been maintained over time, none the least considering the introduction of various accreditation schemes. Furthermore key issues and dilemmas of external quality assurance may have shifted towards the efficiency and impact of improvement and accountability rather than improvement and accountability in itself. Based on developments in the Scandinavian countries the paper discusses if and how a balance between improvement and accountability can be maintained, also in the “age of accreditation”, arguing that neither accountability nor improvement can be connected solely the particular method used. But it also points to challenges to accountability, and not least the impact and efficiency of accountability and improvement, inherent in the practice of accreditation and other methods of external quality assurance.

Introduction
Ever since external quality assurance entered the discourse of higher education as an issue in its own right, a prevalent debate has been that of accountability versus improvement and if the two can co-exist or are indeed incompatible. Particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s the general notion seemed to be that improvement and accountability were incompatible, and hence systems of quality assurance would inevitably tilt to either side. Furthermore much of the discussion took its starting point in a belief that a fundamental linkage existed between initiative and purpose of the quality assurance system, and that improvement could be linked to initiatives taken by the universities themselves and accountability or control to government or other external parties (Thune, 1996).

However, with reference to Danish external quality assurance procedures in the mid-1990s, Thune (1996) suggested that improvement and accountability could be seen as dimensions forming an alliance where the key elements for accomplishing this result was professionalism, careful design and implementation of evaluation methods, openness, trust, and involvement by different stakeholders during the process. Later studies supported this interpretation, suggesting that similar ways of balancing improvement and accountability characterized external quality assurance.
The national external quality assurance systems in Scandinavia were in the 1990s characterized by a mixture of methods, including audits, institutional evaluations and subject reviews. However, responding to a general European interest in standards and comparability and hence even more on (certain aspects of) accountability, accreditation and accreditation-like schemes\(^1\) have in recent years grown increasingly popular (Schwarz & Westerheijden, 2004; Hämäläinen et al 2001).

The increased focus on accreditation raises the question if the balance between improvement and accountability are maintained, or if external quality assurance systems in the Scandinavian countries are currently leaning to the side of accountability and control. For example, since accreditation procedures frequently focus on checking the threshold level by using minimum standards, one could argue that the control aspect has taken the upper hand (Saarinen, 2005). A closer look at the actual practice of accreditation and the overall quality assurance systems may, however, reveal interesting insights as to how improvement and the stimulation of institutional quality cultures are actually brought about (Massy, 1999; Danø & Stensaker, 2007). But it may, on the other hand, also point to challenges, both in respect to the version of quality accounted for in accreditation procedures (cf. Newton, 2007) and in respect to the effectiveness and impact of the various quality assurance schemes, including accreditation and accreditation-like practices.

**The balance of improvement and accountability**

Improvement and accountability can generally be differentiated by purpose and results where improvement, ideally, relates to procedures aimed at strengthening the *quality culture* in higher education institutions by engaging them in a self-learning process. On the contrary accountability, ideally, relates to procedures leading to the assessment of *quality* of teaching and learning in terms of criteria set down by external authorities – opening the door for possible external corrective action (Thune, 1996). In this perspective improvement and accountability could be seen as incompatible.

However, practice does not necessarily conform to ideal types, and a combination or alliance of improvement and accountability were according to Thune (1996) accessible in the Danish external quality assurance processes of the 1990s. Essential to this were the combination of ownership and design of an evaluation process comprising aspects of impartiality, credibility, authority, comprehensiveness, consistency and transparency on the one hand, and trust, commitment and understanding on the other: A standard methodology was applied but with a fitness

\(^1\) The term is taken from a investigation of the appearance of accreditation and the integration of aspects of accreditation in Nordic quality assurance methods (Hämäläinen et al, 2001). Accreditation-like procedures indicate that some but not all aspects in a quality assurance method resemble those of accreditation.
for purpose approach. Evaluations involved external perspectives on the quality of the study programmes in question by including user surveys among students, graduates or employers and assessments by external examiners. But higher education institutions were in the same process involved in the planning of an evaluation process, and self-assessments were integral parts of the documentation. Expert panels comprised external stakeholders as well as academic peers. And all evaluation reports, including documentation were published, but the evaluation results were presented to the institutions involved at a conference prior to publication of the report, and rather than engaging in standards and ranking the evaluation reports emphasized recommendations for improvement (Thune, 1996).

As mentioned above the argument of an alliance of accountability and improvement was supported by later studies of the Danish quality assurance system as well as systems in other Scandinavian countries. Studies showed that institutional responses to external quality assurance processes were closely linked to the design and functioning of these processes and that the “Scandinavian” model of external quality assurance were indeed able to engage the higher education institutions in discussions on quality and improvement (Massy, 1999). But it was also emphasized that such implications did not only relate to formal procedures (as those refereed to above), but just as much to informal aspects, including the actual set up of meetings, the content and way questions were asked, the room for dialogue and feed-back etc. Much institutional dissatisfaction with visits by external review panels could for instance be traced back to whether institutions felt they were partners in the process, and the willingness of the review panel to acknowledge and address issues high on the institutional agenda (Stensaker 1997; 1999; Karlsson et al., 2002).

Current external quality assurance systems in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark

Sweden

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (HSV) was established in 1995 as part of a general decentralisation of the Swedish higher education sector. The responsibilities of HSV are quite broad, comprising external quality assurance activities such as subject assessments and institutional audits, statistics and information about and for students, and ensuring that higher education institutions comply with the law.

With a few exceptions HSV focused most of its quality assurance activities of the 1990s on institutional audits supporting institutional improvement and the establishment of internal quality assurance procedures at the higher education institutions. A total of 33 institutions were audited twice within the period of 1995-1998 and 1999-2002. Based on evidence from the second round, HSV found that 70% of the higher education institutions had advanced on mission and strategies, evaluation activities, student influence, co-operation with stakeholders, internationalisation, and educational development (Omar & Liuhanen, 2005).
Based on an expressed wish by the Swedish government to assess the quality of the study programmes offered (as opposed to quality assurance or improvement activities) HSV has since 2002 primarily carried out subject reviews of study programmes at bachelor level and above (Wahlén, 2004). The subject reviews serve a dual purpose aiming at improvement and assessing if study programmes comply with the aims and legislation put down by law (Hämäläinen et al., 2001). In severe cases of ‘quality failure’, HSV can deprive the institution of degree awarding power within a certain discipline. This is one area in which the subject reviews show similarities to accreditation processes. Another is the use of standard criteria or aspects governing each review. These are not preset but have been developed over the years and reflect general themes regarded by the HSV to be fundamental for higher education processes and results (Wahlén, 2004).

Norway
Following a decade of scattered evaluations and no consistent quality assurance system the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) was established in 2003 as part of a grand, so-called Quality Reform of the higher education system in Norway. Of the three systems presented here, the Norwegian system embodied by NOKUT can be seen to represent the most comprehensive national strategy of external quality assurance.

NOKUT carries out accreditation and recognition of quality systems, institutions and course provision and institutional audits. It is responsible for handling applications for recognition of foreign qualifications, and occasionally, NOKUT also carries out the so-called revisions (re-accreditations) of existing study programmes and other evaluations. These are carried out on request by the government. NOKUT is an independent decision-making body in relation to the issuing of recognition of degrees and the accreditation of higher education institutions and new programmes of study (Omar & Liuhanen, 2005).

The Norwegian institutional system is built on a basic principle of differentiation and institutional drift. Thus, universities can establish bachelor-, master-, and Ph.D.-programmes without seeking permission by any other authority whereas some private colleges cannot even establish new bachelor programmes without accreditation by NOKUT. By way of institutional accreditation colleges may, however, gain a ‘higher’ institutional status and become self-accrediting, i.e. of new bachelor programmes. On the other hand, universities may loose accrediting powers in cases where audits reveal serious flaws in their internal quality assurance procedures. Thus the potential costs to institutions in case of negative results are more severe in the case of audits as compared to accreditations (Stensaker, 2004). Unlike the accreditations, audits follow a cyclical principle and can as such be seen to represent the systematic or recurring dimension in the Norwegian quality assurance system. Moreover they can be said to contain a considerable aspect of accountability and control, blurring traditional ideas of the purposes served by the different quality assurance methods.
Denmark
In Denmark, external quality assurance of the higher education system is divided into three different sections: a relatively comprehensive external examiner system, a number of systematic quality assurance activities operated primarily by the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) and a ministerial system of recognition of new study programmes. EVA was established in 1999 and succeeded the Danish Centre for Evaluation and Quality Assurance (EVC) who had carried out a vast number of programme evaluations during the 1990s in accordance with a preset rotating scheme. After an initial period of experimenting with a range of quality assurance approaches EVA decided on a combined strategy to ensure coverage and systematic quality assurance of the entire higher education system: accreditations of institutions and study programmes have been carried out in the field of vocational higher education, while audits and evaluations of study programmes have been the main activity with regard to universities.

The Danish Parliament is, at the moment, debating a bill for a comprehensive system of programme accreditations covering all of higher education from short-cycle to university programmes. An accreditation board will formally make decisions about all programmes under accreditation. While operators as well as the operational aspects of the accreditation processes are likely to vary across the different fields of education, all assessments for accreditation should include assessments of ‘traditional’ indicators of quality (such as organisation, syllabus, qualifications of teaching staff) as well as assessments of relevance, such as employability of graduates etc. Failure to obtain accreditation may imply that the study programme in question will no longer be eligible for public funding.

Institutional audits and other methods will remain part of EVA’s activities but, given the scope of the new accreditation scheme, they are likely to play a secondary role, at least in the years to come. However, the accreditations and needs for institutional capacity building will most probably result in increased needs for advice and thus new assignments and activities in the future, for EVA as well as other actors within the field of external quality assurance.

Aspects of improvement Scandinavian quality assurance in the age of accreditation
Considerable development has taken place in the last 5-10 years in regard to the practice of external quality assurance in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Generally the entire field seems to have expanded and increased in coverage. And accreditation or accreditation-like procedures and assessments of quality according to predefined criteria and standards are integral parts of all three systems indicating a more distinct focus on transparency, accountability and control. But accreditation and accreditation-like schemes are not the only approach. Methods traditionally associated with improvement and the stimulation of an institutional quality culture, such as audits, are present in Denmark and Norway, and in Sweden a new round of
institutional audits may replace the current subject assessment scheme as the tool for systematic external quality assurance (Vinther-Jørgensen and Hansen, 2006).

The particular label of the quality assurance method or approach is, however, no guarantee of either improvement or accountability. On the contrary, as indicated in the description of particularly the Norwegian quality assurance system the boundaries between various methods and the purposes and effects of each method may very well blur. Furthermore, despite stated differences in purposes and implications of various quality assurance methods (e.g. audits and accreditations) the experience on behalf of the institutions accredited or audited of what is taking place may not adhere to the methodological differences of each approach. Following the arguments of the balance between accountability and improvement this experience relies on the ability of the quality assurance agencies to design processes reflecting impartiality, credibility, authority, comprehensiveness, consistency and transparency while ensuring trust, commitment and understanding, and the sensitivity of the processes to address issues high on the institutional agenda (Thune, 1996; Stensaker, 1997; 1999; Karlsson et al 2002).

A closer look at how accreditations and accreditation-like procedures are carried out in Scandinavia compared to external quality assurance processes of the 1990s reveal interesting aspects of integration and continuity as well as transformation. While the accreditations do indeed focus on the ability to account for quality of teaching and learning in accordance with predefined standards and criteria, these standards and criteria have been presented and to a varying extent debated among the higher education institutions. Most of the criteria and standards can be termed ‘soft’ or open rather than closed (Stensaker, 2004; Wahlén, 2004; EVA, 2006 B), leaving room for adjustment to institutional agendas and realities, while at the same time posing an obvious threat of the interpretation to rely too heavily of agendas represented by the individual experts (cf. Wahlén, 2004). Some of the accreditation processes are to a large extent focused on documentation of the quality of educational (or quality assurance) processes in accordance with preset standards, but documentation of steps taken in regard to improving these processes may in some cases be sufficient (cf. the Danish accreditations of study programmes).

All of the accreditations and accreditation-like schemes include elements to promote commitment and engagement of the institutions under accreditation. In Denmark representatives of the institutions are invited to a meeting at which the process, criteria and their meaning are discussed. Institutions are also given the opportunity to provide names for the expert panel and invited to comment on possible conflicts of interests – a process common in Norway too. In Sweden bilateral meetings at which various elements of the review process are discussed, including time frame and special needs of each subject, ensure dialogue and commitment to the process. Apart from the initial meetings and other communication between representatives of institutions or study programmes and professionals of the quality assurance agency, site-visits are pivotal in promoting dialogue and trust or just the opposite.
Criteria for the composition of expert panels are common (cf. NOKUT, 2003; EVA, 2006 A), and training of experts is generally considered an important element in all countries, ensuring an understanding of the accreditation processes in general and the role of the site-visit in particular. Last but not least, all of the Scandinavian accreditation schemes involve an element of hearing or even engaging the institutions in a dialogue about the results of the accreditation process: In Denmark institutions can only comment on factual errors prior to the final version of the accreditation report, whereas the Norwegian accreditation council include comments from institutions in its decision making. In Sweden a conference for the institutions involved is held three months after the publication of the final results of the accreditation process.

**Efficiency and impact of improvement and accountability in a multifaceted field of external quality assurance?**

In light of the argument made above aspects of improvement seem to prevail in Scandinavian quality assurance processes despite the introduction of new methods incorporating a stronger focus on accountability. This leads to the conclusion that not only does the balance between improvement and accountability prevail. Taking the argument against linkages between initiative and purpose of the quality assurance activity even further, connexions between purpose and method or approach are more ambiguous than previously assumed. Aspects of improvement and accountability seem to depend on the actual content, focus and process of the actual quality assurance activity, including the ability to engage higher education institutions in the process, rather than on expressed intentions and methodological label. This observation is supported by Danish experiences where representatives of vocational higher education institutions have expressed great appreciation of the basis for institutional improvement laid down by the institutional accreditations within this field of education. This corresponds to the evidence provided from studies of other, more improvement oriented quality assurance methods such as institutional audits etc. (Stensaker, 1997; Massy, 1999).

However, while effects on institutional quality cultures and discourses of the Scandinavian external quality assurance systems seem to be reasonable well proven, the impact on the actual quality in terms of learning processes and results of higher education remain to be an open question. Few studies have systematically addressed the extent to which the ‘black box’ of quality of learning processes and results of higher education is in fact opened up and affected by the various quality assurance initiatives (Stensaker, 2007). The few studies that are actually carried out cannot detect any clear linkages between the internal quality assurance activities addressed by much external quality assurance on the one hand and improvement of quality on the other (NIFU STEP, 2006). Naturally, this calls for further studies of impact of internal quality assurance processes on quality as well as the ability external quality assurance initiative to ensure better linkages. But it also reinforces the importance of clarification of the versions of quality governing institutional as well as external
quality assurance and those enquired for when asking about the actual effect on quality (cf. Newton, 2007). What kind of quality do we ask and account for in institutional and external quality assurance processes? Is it quality in terms of outcome or process standards, is it quality defined as excellence or fitness for purpose, or is it quality seen as value for money or transformation (in terms of the development or empowerment of students through the learning process)? How do the version of quality accounted for correspond with the expectations of external stakeholders of higher education and quality assurance such as politicians and employers? And finally, do we look for the same versions of quality accounted for in the quality assurance processes when investigating the impact of these processes?

As mentioned above the experience and hence effect of quality assurance activities on behalf of the higher education institutions does not relate to the label or expressed purpose of the specific activity. Rather it depends on the ability of the organisations and persons responsible for the quality assurance activity to address issues high on the institutional agenda and to engage representatives of the higher education institutions in a debate on quality and improvement. The ability to engage representatives of the higher education institutions may, however, face new challenges which cannot be met by process and content alone. Hence higher education institutions of today are met with a vast number of steering and assurance initiatives besides quality assurance (Danø & Stensaker, 2007).

Faced with increased demands on accountability from a number of external parties some institutions are inclined to build up entire units or systems assigned primarily to meet these demands in terms of written strategies, procedures etc. While ensuring strong professionalism in the department of accountability and (possibly) internal quality assurance systems, this may cause a displacement of the (systematic) discourse on quality and quality improvement to bureaucratic systems rather than the people in charge of the educational processes. And thus ritualism and tokenism (cf. Newton, 2007) may take the upper hand in respect to external quality assurance rather than dialogue and stimulation of quality, irrespective of the focus on the quality assurance method as well as the design of the process.

In light of the discussions above a conclusive remark may be that acknowledging the fact that improvement and accountability are not separable to approaches or even purposes of quality assurance the focus of the debate should be removed to questions of efficiency and impact: Do quality assurance initiatives collectively and efficiently contribute to engaging higher education institutions in discourses of improving quality, can quality assurance processes be designed to address the various versions of quality, and how do we investigate the impacts of the various processes and activities in order to improve quality of quality assurance?
Literature
Abstract

A great advancement has been achieved in the area of higher education in China in recent years. By the end of 2005, there had been 1,792 institutions of higher learning across the country with a total student body of 23 million studying in different categories of higher education institutions, of them there were 8.49 million students studying at 701 regular universities and colleges, and 7.13 million students studying at 1,091 postsecondary vocational and technical schools.

The first round of evaluation officially started from the second half of 2003, and was scheduled to be implemented in the first half of 2008. A expert team will visit the university for about one week, and write down a report suggesting the result of evaluation, based on the "Evaluation of University Baccalaureate Programs Project" drafted by MOE, and the result falls into 4 categories: "Excellent"、"Good"、"Accepted" and "Not Accepted". At the beginning of every year, the committee of experts of MOE will discuss the result suggested by the expert team to vote to the final decision. The outcomes will be put into publication. The evaluation of regular universities and colleges is organized by HEEC directly and the budget is allocated by the government for evaluation, which can insure the justice and authority of the evaluation.

A recent survey of 171 institutions which had already undergone evaluation shows that 99% of the institution faculty and students regard the quality assurance mechanism as necessary and important. They consider the quality assurance mechanism to be a significant measure which has improved the college infrastructure and basic facilities, strengthened their capacity for student education, upgraded their research work, and improved their services for society, and come up with a host of influential research results and findings.

1 A Profile of the Higher Education in China

There are 1,791 institutions of higher learning across the country, including 701 regular universities and colleges and 1,091 post secondary vocational and technical schools. A great advancement has been achieved in the area of higher education in China in recent years. By the end of 2005, the total number of the students studying in different categories of higher education institutions has reached more than 23 million.
Besides, there were 10.7 million students studying in 295 independent colleges (the independent colleges refer to the non-government baccalaureate degree programs/undergraduate colleges established by regular universities or colleges and non-government organizations, and are not funded by government budget. They are independent corporate bodies and have the right to recruit students.) In the same year, the gross enrollment rate reached 21% which means the higher education in China had welcomed the stage of development in commons.

During the 10th five-year plan period, higher education supplied strong and reliable human and intellectual resources in support of the development of the country, with 13.97 million graduates doing all kinds jobs.

In recent years, not only do we extend the scale of higher education, but we also speed up and deepen the higher education reform. The reforms of higher education consist of five parts, reforms of education provision, management, investment, recruitment and job-placement, and the inner-institute management, among which management reform is of most importance and difficulty. The overall objectives of higher education reform are to smooth the relationship among government, society and HEIs, setting up and perfecting a new system in which the state is responsible for the overall planning and macro management while the HEIs follow the laws and enjoy the autonomy to provide education according to needs of the society.

The two pivotal government programs----Project 211 for developing 100 fist-class universities and a number of key fields of research for the 21st century and Project 985 for developing world-class universities and world-famous research-oriented universities----are making steady headway. The universities involved have markedly improved their infrastructure, strengthened their capacity for student education, upgraded their research work, and improved their services for society, and come up with a host of influential research results and findings. The two programs have put these universities in a better position to supply strong and reliable human and intellectual resources in sport of our country.

In the following period, the guiding principle for the development of higher education in China is respecting the sense of science, slowing down the rapid increase rate of the university students, and stressing the enhancement of the quality of higher education. We will adhere to our emphasis on students and improve the quality of education.

2 Higher Education quality assurance mechanisms in China
(1)The development of the Higher Education quality assurance mechanism in China

a. The Higher Education quality assurance mechanism in China experienced three stages
Stage 1, 1985 ~1994, the stage of research ---- In 1985, Higher Engineering Education Evaluation started up as a trial. In 1990, “Draft Regulation of Higher Education Institution Evaluation” was issued by the then The Ministry of Education, which is the first regulation on higher education evaluation in China and issued the birth of Higher Education quality assurance mechanism in China.
Stage 2, 1994~2002, the stage of trial ---- then The Ministry of Education started to evaluate the baccalaureate programs as planed. 254 baccalaureate programs had
undergone evaluation by the end of 2002. **Stage 3**, 2003–present is the stage of regular --- “Action Plan of Education Innovation 2003–2008” makes it clear that all higher education institutions in China undergo the quality evaluation every five years, and the Higher Education Evaluation Center (HEEC) of the Ministry of Education (MOE) was established in August 2004. This marks a new stage for the development of higher education quality assurance mechanism in China.

b. **The Development Of methods used as parts of the** higher education quality assurance mechanism in China

In 1993, the Department of Higher Education of former MOE began to research the assessment plan and the practice of teaching assessment. Aimed at helping the HEIs consistently identify their schooling directive ideology, improving the schooling conditions, enhancing the basic construction of teaching, deepening teaching reform, increasing management level and gradually setting up and perfecting the system of self-development and self-restrain so as to continuously improve education quality and increase schooling efficiency. There are three forms of assessment: the first is the pass level teaching assessment to the universities with comparatively weak basis and short history of undergraduate education; the second is the excellent level assessment to the universities with good basis, high teaching level and a comparatively long history of undergraduate education; and the last one is the random level assessment to the universities between pass level and excellent level. Since 1994, 146 HEIs with weak basis and short history of undergraduate education have undertook the pass level assessment step by step and 10 key universities have undertook the excellent level assessment. The development of teaching assessment evoked intense repercussions among educational administrative departments and HEIs and played an important role in promoting the improvement of higher education quality.

In 2002, the above3 types of evaluation were combined into one: “Evaluation of University Baccalaureate Programs Project”, with four resultant categories: “Excellent,” “Good,” “Accepted,” and “Not Accepted”. The current standards include 7 basic standards, 19 extended standards, 44 observation focuses and one additional characteristic item.

(2) **The Classification of Current higher education quality assurance mechanism in China**

The current higher education quality assurance mechanism in China is divided into 4 categories:

a. **Regular universities and colleges evaluation.**

The first round of evaluation officially started from the second half of 2003, and was scheduled to be accomplished in the first half of 2008.

b. **Tertiary colleges evaluation.**

From 2003, MOE drafted an evaluation plan for tertiary colleges. The evaluation is implemented by each provincial education department. The MOE will make periodical checks on the implementation work.

c. **The independent college evaluation.**

At present, an evaluation plan for tertiary colleges has already been drafted and the evaluation will start in 2007 as a trial. The trial will be organized by HEEC of MOE, and the result will fall to 2 categories: eligible and not eligible. The evaluation aims to regulate the independent colleges and ensure their teaching quality. Eligible
evaluation will be used.

**d. Specialized programs evaluation.**
The evaluation is now on trial.

Graduate schools quality assurance is organized and implemented by the degree and post graduate teaching development center of MOE.

### (3). Guiding principle, evaluation procedure and method of higher education quality assurance mechanism in China

The guiding principle for the higher education quality assurance in China focuses on “evaluation to enhance improvement, evaluation to enhance change, evaluation to enhance management, incorporation of evaluation with change, and emphasis on change”.

The procedure:

**Step 1.** Self-study and improvement of institutions (duration of one year or more)
This is the most important stage. During this stage, the institutions improve themselves in order to meet the evaluation standards and wait for the campus visits by expert teams.

**Step 2.** Campus visit by an evaluation team (5 days or so)
The expert teams stay in the institutions for 5 days, evaluating them according to the evaluation standards, writing down a report with a suggested result of the evaluation. (“Excellent”, “Good”, “Accepted”, “Not Accepted”)

There are several ways for the experts to evaluate the institutions: checking out the infrastructure, basic facilities and academic culture, visiting the teaching and administrating departments, attending classes with students, holding discussion meetings, testing the students’ basic theories & skills, reading their test papers and graduation thesis or designs, interviewing the employers who hire the graduates, etc.

After getting a result, the expert team send it to MOE. At the beginning of every year, the committee of experts of MOE will discuss them, and vote to the final decision. MOE will then publish the outcomes of evaluation.

**Step 3.** enhancement of improvement and change (about one year)
The institution will make a plan for improvement and change according to the experts’ suggestion, and submit it to HEEC of MOE within one month after the campus visit by the expert team. The institution, implementing the plan of improvement and change in one year, will have to report to the HEEC of MOE the result of improvement. It will be the emphasis of the next round of evaluation.

### The effect of quality assurance mechanism

A recent survey of 171 institutions which had already undergone evaluation shows that 99% of the institution faculty and students regard the quality assurance mechanism as necessary and important. They consider the quality assurance mechanism to be a significant measure which has improved the college infrastructure and basic facilities, strengthened their capacity for student education, upgraded their research work, and improved their services for society, and come up with a host of...
influential research results and findings.

In addition, the quality assurance mechanism also promotes the communication among various schools, helping them to exchange new ideas in education and to improve management.

In the future, HEEC will conduct research on the relation between quality assurance mechanism and government policies, for example-- enrollment distribution, examination and approve of baccalaureate degree programs and allocation of government funds.

In conclusion, in order to encourage higher education institution to further improve teaching quality and to deepen the reform of education, we need to establish a quality assurance mechanism with high efficiency and valid results. The policy is as follow:

Establish a five-year cycle of evaluating institutions of higher education in a systematic and standardized manner.

Maintain a database to collect the basic institutional information concerning college infrastructure and other basic facilities; make such information available to the public to strengthen public awareness of the effectiveness of higher education institutions.

Combine both internal and external evaluation effort to actively encourage institutions to set up their internal quality assurance mechanism.

3. The vision of higher education quality assurance mechanism in China

1. Enhance the guidance to different level and different style of institutions.
   Additional regulations were set respectively for key universities, medical colleges, sports colleges and art colleges as a complementary to the “Evaluation of University Baccalaureate Programs Project” in order to be practical.

2. Perfect the policy of transparent quality assurance mechanism
   The policy of transparent quality assurance mechanism has been carried out since 2006. According to the policy, it is now necessary to maintain a database to collect the basic institutional information concerning college infrastructure and other basic facilities every year, and make such information available to the public. The self-study report and the expert team report of evaluation are published on the website of HEEC so as to be supervised by the public.

3. Encourage the higher education institutions to set up their internal quality assurance mechanism.
   One of the important purposes of evaluation is to help institutions find out their own shortage and encourage them to set up their internal quality assurance mechanism. From now on, HEEC will pay more attention to the construction and effect of institutions’ internal quality assurance mechanism, and evaluate the institutions on dynamic basis.

4. Strengthen research on quality assurance mechanism theory and practice.
   HEEC will never stop this practice in order to achieve the goal of making evaluation
more professional, standard and systematic.

5 Conduct training for evaluators and ensure the quality of expert teams.
Excellent experts are necessary for qualified quality assurance mechanism. At present, HEEC has established a pool of over 2,000 experts to perform evaluation. The experts have been highly appreciated by the evaluated institutions for their professional ethics and skills. HEEC will conduct more and better trainings for evaluators.

6. Inform citizens more about the quality assurance mechanism and form a harmonious atmosphere for it.
HEEC will inform citizens more about the quality assurance mechanism, making them aware of the importance, necessity as well as effect of quality assurance mechanism, thus form a harmonious atmosphere for it and gain more understanding, attention and support.

7. Establish the mechanism of after-evaluation revisit and check on the improvement.
The 3rd stage of evaluation, which is enhancement of improvement and change, is vital for making quality assurance mechanism result useful and valuable. HEEC is now studying on the establishment of the mechanism of after-evaluation revisit and check on the improvement, in order to gain the institutions’ attention and urge them to improve teaching technique and develop education quality.

8. Develop the network of quality assurance organizations.
At present, many provinces and institutions have set up their own quality assurance organizations as required, and they have been performing well in quality assurance research, practice and consultation. HEEC will make a better plan for the development of network of quality assurance organizations; make it more convenient for them to communicate, improve the network to be more powerful and professional.

9. Actively promote the research and realization of legislation on quality assurance mechanism.

10. Initiate the research for the next round of quality assurance evaluation and promote the improvement of it.

11. Develop international cooperation and exchanges with higher education assurance agencies in other countries.

300 baccalaureate degree universities have undergone evaluation up to now and the first round of quality assurance evaluation will end in the first half of 2008 as scheduled. HEEC has already started to plan for the next round, whose emphasis will be eligible evaluation of newly established baccalaureate degree universities, and the form of the mode to foster innovation talents in the other universities.

4. The HEEC: mission statement
The Higher Education Evaluation Center (HEEC) of the Ministry of Education (MOE), which was established in August 2004, is an independent corporate body as well as an administrative body under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. The
main responsibility is:

a. Organize and implement **evaluation**, based on the guidelines, regulations, and evaluation criteria of the MOE, of teaching performance of institutions of higher education, of other education organizations, and of specialized education.
b. Conduct research in the areas of policies, regulations, and theories in higher education reform and **evaluation**, and provide data for the decision making body of the MOE.
c. Develop international cooperation and exchanges with higher education quality assurance agencies/commissions in other countries.
d. Provide consultation and information service in the area of higher education quality assurance and other related services authorized by MOE.

Currently, the funds of Higher Education Evaluation Center of MOE come from two sources: budget allocated by the Government for evaluation and self-funding. The Center is currently staffed with 15 people, with one Director and one Deputy Director. The staff is expected to expand to 30 in the future.

The Center is divided into 4 departments:
Colligate office: assist the superiors to coordinate the relevant department jobs; in charge of the human resources, secretary, finance, ext.; Teaching evaluation Dep.; Specialized Programs evaluation Dep.; Education & Training Dep.

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**Introduction**

Progress and prosperity of a country, largely depends on the choices of education made available to its people. Indeed, education is one of the most powerful instruments of change. Its importance for achieving national goals through producing young minds imbued with knowledge, attitudes, skills and competencies to shape the future destiny of the nation has been fully recognized by the Government of Pakistan.

Strengthening the quality of education has become a global agenda at all educational level. The quality of education is important not only for preparing individuals for the subsequent educational levels but to equip them with the requisite basic life skills. Quality education also ensures increased access and it is mainly due to these reasons that various international Forums and Declarations have pledged improvements in quality of education. National commitment towards quality education has become significantly visible since the late eighties; however the need for quality education had been emphasized since the creation of Pakistan. While addressing the first Education Conference held in Karachi, on September 26, 1947, the founder of Pakistan Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah said, “*Education is a matter of life and death for Pakistan. The world is progressing so rapidly that without requisite advance in education, not only shall we be left behind others but may be wiped out altogether*”. From then onwards, the government has experimented a number of initiatives and interventions for improving quality with national and foreign funding.

There is no denial that education and training play a crucial role in helping individuals and societies to adapt to profound social, economic and cultural change, and foster the development of the human capital needed for economic growth. The ability of education and training systems to fulfill these roles depends on whether educational institutions themselves respond to change, and on whether teachers develop and deliver educational content in ways that meet the needs of today’s and tomorrow’s citizens. Policy-makers and society at large have high expectations of teachers as professionals, role models and community leaders. Teachers are asked to manage the far-reaching changes that are taking place in and outside schools and to implement the complex reforms of education systems that are under way in many of the developing countries. Educational policy-makers face a difficult balancing act in managing teacher deployment effectively and efficiently. They need to ensure that the investment made in teachers is sufficient and proportionate to the demands placed upon them. This means both that the qualifications of the teaching force must be adequate and that the salaries and working conditions of teachers must be sufficiently competitive to attract and retain people with the desired qualifications into the teaching profession.
This presentation aims to deal with the current Teacher Education programmes and factors responsible for shaping the quality of teacher education in the country such as:

1. **Education System in Pakistan (Overview)**
2. **Situational Analysis of In-Service and Pre-Service Teacher Training.**
3. **Development and management of teacher education programmes.**
4. **Faculty development Programmes.**
5. **Enrichment of curriculum content, methods, evaluation techniques, teaching aids and other teacher related resources.**
6. **Quality Assurance in Teacher Education.**
7. **Lessons from the Past & Strategies for the Future.**

1. **Education System in Pakistan**

   **Brief Overview**

   Education in Pakistan is largely a provincial matter. Although the Ministry of Education (MOE) presides over Pakistan’s entire system of education, each province has its own department of education. The central government continues to be the overall policy-making, coordinating, and advisory authority. Educational institutions located in the federal capital territory are administered directly by the MOE.

   Schools normally close for ten weeks from the beginning of June until mid-late August. Winter holidays usually run from mid-December to early January.

   Public and private schools, in addition to Islamic madrasahs, provide primary and secondary education.

   Universities are administered by the provincial governments, but are funded by the central government through the Higher Education Commission (HEC). The University Grants Commission of Pakistan has been defunct now since 2002 when it was superseded by the HEC.

   The HEC encompasses all degree granting universities and institutions (public and private) and is responsible for coordinating reviews and evaluations of all academic programs. In addition, the HEC oversees the planning, development and chartering of both public and private institutions of higher education.

**VITAL STATISTICS**

**Population:** 147,663,429 (July 2002 est.)

**Location:** Southern Asia, bordering the Arabian Sea, between India on the east and Iran and Afghanistan on the west and China in the north.

**Provinces:** Punjab, Sind, North West Frontier Province (NWFP), and Baluchistan

**Area:** 796,096 square km (307,374 km)
Language: Punjabi 48%, Sindhi 12%, Siraiki (a Punjabi variant) 10%, Pashtu 8%, Urdu (official) 8%, Balochi 3%, Hindko 2%, Brahui 1%, English (official and lingua franca of Pakistani elite and most government ministries), Burushaski, and other 8%.

Literacy: Pakistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the region currently estimated at about 51.6% (2002). However, the wide inter and intra provincial disparities present a discriminating scenario. Literacy ranged from 57.8% among urban male population of Sindh to 1.75% among the rural female of Balochistan. In absolute terms the number of illiterates in ten plus age group is 51.8 million (2001). 42.7% (by definition, total population age 15 or older)

Currency: Pakistani rupee (PKR)

GDP (2000): US$ Budgetary allocations to education have remained below 2% of the GDP

PRIMARY EDUCATION

Primary education lasts five years (Grades I-V) beginning at age five and ending at age 10. The language of instruction is either Urdu or the regional language. The curriculum includes reading, writing, arithmetic, general science, social studies, religious studies, and physical education.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Secondary Education's currently divided into three stages: a three-year stage offered in middle schools; a two-year stage offered in secondary schools; and a further two-year stage in higher secondary schools and intermediate and degree colleges.

- Middle level education: Lasts from Grades VI through VIII (ages 11-13). The curriculum includes the compulsory subjects of Urdu, English, mathematics, sciences, social studies, and Islamic studies. Students are continuously assessed through coursework and examinations on an annual and semester basis.
- Secondary level education: Lasts from Grades IX through X (ages 14 and 15). At the lower secondary stage students select from among two streams of study: science or humanities. The Secondary School Certificate is awarded upon successful completion of the examinations administered at the end of Grade X.
- Higher secondary level education: Sometimes referred to as the “intermediate stage”, lasts from Grades XI and XII (ages 16 to 18) and is considered part of the student’s college education. At this level, students specialize in either science or humanities. Students who successfully pass the examinations at the end of Grade XII are awarded one of the following depending on the province: the Higher Secondary School Certificate, or the Intermediate Examination Certificate.
MADRASAHS

The madrasah system operates in parallel with the formal education system and, provides Islamic education based mainly on the Holy Quran and the Hadith (teachings of the prophet Muhammad). Enrollment is free of charge and most madrasahs provide free room and board as well.

According to a report published in Dec. 2004 by the U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS), the number of madrasahs in Pakistan increased more than 10 fold between 1947 and 1988. Currently there are more than 10,000 madrasahs teaching up to two million schoolchildren.

Madrasah primary schools, called maktabs, are usually attached to mosques, and provide basic Islamic education focusing on the reading and memorization of the Quran. Secondary school madrasahs provide advanced instruction in Islamic education. In an attempt to better integrate the Islamic and formal education systems, contemporary subjects such as English, mathematics, general science and computer science have recently been introduced into the madrasah curriculum.

The madrasahs are largely autonomous and have their own administrative system although they do receive grants from the central government. Several official bodies regulate the madrasahs and award certificates. These include the Jamea-tus Safiya, the Wafaq-ul-Madaris, and the Tanzeem-ul-Madaris.

Urdu and Arabic are the languages of instruction in the madrasahs.

Madrasahs have their own examination system, and award certificates called sanads. Following are the different levels and certificates of the madrasah system and how they correspond to the formal system:

- Hifz/Tajweed-wa-Qiraat/Ibtedayia = Primary School
- Mutawassita = Middle School
- Sanviya Aama = Secondary School Certificate
- Sanaviya Khassa and above = Higher Secondary School Certificate

Holders of the Sanaviya Khassa are qualified to pursue higher education within the madrasah system, or apply to colleges and universities within the formal sector.

VOCATIONAL/TECHNICAL SECONDARY EDUCATION

Vocational schools offer one-year certificate and two-year diploma programs in various trades at the secondary level (Grades IX and X) leading to the Secondary School Certificate in technical subjects.
SYSTEM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In Pakistan, higher education refers to all levels of education above grade 12, generally corresponding with the age bracket of 17 to 23 years. It is estimated that Pakistan presently has a population of 18 million in this category, and the number is expected to increase to 25 million by 2010. Of this segment of the population, 2.6% (approximately 475,000) are enrolled in institutions of higher education (1996 data); this proportion is one of the lowest in the world; for India (1990 data) and Iran (1994 data) the figure are 6.2% and 12.7% respectively (UNESCO Statistical year book 1996).

The higher education system comprises universities and colleges. Total number of colleges across the country is 754 out of which 119 are in private sector. The total number of universities in both public and private sector are shown in Fig 1.

### Table 1: Number of Public and Private Sector Universities & Degree Awarding Institutions (DAIs) in Pakistan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Public Universities</th>
<th>Degree Awarding Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Female</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947-48</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-51</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959-60</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-61</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-62</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963-64</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964-65</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-66</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-71</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-72</td>
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<td>1972-73</td>
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<td>1974-75</td>
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<td>1976-77</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>1977-78</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>1978-79</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>1979-80</td>
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<td>1980-81</td>
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<td>1981-82</td>
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<td>1982-83</td>
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<td>1983-84</td>
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<td>1984-85</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>19</td>
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</tr>
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<td>1986-87</td>
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<td>1987-88</td>
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<td>1988-89</td>
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<td>1990-91</td>
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<td>1991-92</td>
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<td>1992-93</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>1993-94</td>
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<td>1994-95</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995-96</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-00</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05*</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06**</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* DHA Sui University Karachi, Naseer Hussain University withdrawn from HEC list due to lack of physical, financial & academic infrastructure.
** Institute of South Asia Upgraded to University in July 2005. Khawar College for Women shifted from Public to Private sector.

Note: The years before 1970-71, where there is no change in the data, is not given.
As of 2004-2005 Pakistan, have 107 public and private degree granting institutions. In addition, there are many degree granting institutes (both private and public) specializing in certain disciplines like business and information technology.

The Higher Education Commission (HEC), prescribes the guidelines under which all institutions of higher education may open and operate. It monitors all degree-granting higher education programs for quality assessment and is responsible for chartering both public and private institutions of higher education.

**Admission requirement:** The Higher Secondary School Certificate is the general admission requirement for university study.

**Language of instruction:** English and Urdu

UNIVERSITY HIGHER EDUCATION

**Stage I:** A Bachelor’s Pass Degree is usually awarded after a two-year program. The Honor’s Bachelor’s Degree is awarded after three years of fulltime study in arts and humanities, sciences and commerce. Bachelor’s degrees in engineering, pharmacy and computer science take four years of study, and medicine requires five.

**Stage II:** The Master’s degree requires two years of study after the Pass degree and one year after the honor’s bachelor’s degree.

**Stage III:** A doctoral degree normally requires a minimum of three years of study beyond the master’s degree. However, the Doctor of Literature (Dlitt), Doctor of Science ((DSc) and Doctor of Law (LLD) are awarded after five-to-seven years of study.

**Faculty**

**Full and Part Time Faculty**

There were 37,428 faculty members during 2003-04, out of which 14,616 were Full Time and 22,812 were Part Time faculty members in the Public and Private sector universities. The major contribution in part time faculty is that of Distance Learning universities having 17,620 faculty members. The share of part time faculty to total faculty was 21.12 % and 36.00% in Public sector (excluding Distance Learning) and Private sector universities respectively.

NON-UNIVERSITY HIGHER EDUCATION

Non-university higher education is provided by polytechnics, technical and commercial institutes and colleges. These institutions offer programs that generally last two-to-three years and lead to certificates and diplomas in commercial and technical fields. Boards of technical education in the various provinces award certificates and diplomas.
Situational Analysis of In-Service and Pre-Service Teacher Training.

Importance of education in the coming years is recognized as a necessary ingredient for sustainable economic growth. Education is seen as the key to better quality of life as well as a means of providing a new set of skills required for the future years.

According to the vision of the Quaid-e-Azam, scientific and technical education should be given to the people to compete with the fast-developing world. Sound education should be provided to the people to instill in them the highest sense of honor, integrity, responsibility, and selfless service to the nation. Investment in human capital prepares the critical mass of educated manpower on the one hand, and on the other hand prepares future leaders in various fields to steer successfully the country through thick and thin.

The existing teacher-training education programmes are not being considered adequately responsive to the demands for quality education in the school system. There is a wide of issues and concerns being expressed about teacher education in Pakistan. Quality is at the heart of education and teachers play a crucial role to provide quality education. In the context of a crisis-level teacher shortage, especially a shortage of qualified teachers, the stakeholders identified major current trends of teacher education and developing evidence-based policy-oriented teacher indicators to help decision-makers deal with teacher-trends affecting national development.

At present the following institutions are offering various programmes. The detail is in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programmes &amp; Institutions</th>
<th>Punjab</th>
<th>Sindh</th>
<th>NWFP</th>
<th>Balochistan</th>
<th>Federal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PTC/CT (G.C.E.Ts)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Ed/B.S.Ed (Colleges of Education)</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.Ed, M.A Education IERs/Universities Deptt of Education</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension/Staff Development (In-Service Education)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.I.T.Es</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>___</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source; National Educational Policy 1998-2010 Government of Pakistan)

Since the independence of Pakistan, there has been a substantial expansion in teacher education institutions. At present there are 90 elementary colleges and 30 high schools which offer teacher training programmes for PTC (primary Teaching Certificate) and CT (Certificate in Teaching) to teachers. Institutions which prepare secondary school teachers are known as Colleges of Education. At present there are 11 Colleges of Education, 5 Institutes of Education & Research and 3 Departments of Education of Universities (Public Sector) which offer programmes of Secondary school teacher education leading to a Bachelor’s degree in Education (B.Ed). The Allama Iqbal Open University is also contributing in the training of
teachers by means of distance learning technique. It offers PTC, CT, B.Ed, and M.Ed programmes of teacher education. The description of various programmes is given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Programme</th>
<th>Qualification for Admission</th>
<th>Duration Of Training</th>
<th>Classes to Teach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P.T.C</td>
<td>SSC Certificate</td>
<td>1 Academic Year</td>
<td>I-V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.T</td>
<td>HSSC Certificate</td>
<td>1 Academic Year</td>
<td>I-VIII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.S.Ed.(12+3)</td>
<td>HSSC Certificate</td>
<td>3 Academic Year</td>
<td>VI-X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Ed</td>
<td>B.A/ B.Sc</td>
<td>1 Academic Year</td>
<td>VI-X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.Ed</td>
<td>B.Ed</td>
<td>1 Academic Year</td>
<td>VI-XII+ Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher's of PTC, CT and B.Ed + Supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.A Education</td>
<td>B.A/ B.Sc</td>
<td>2 Academic Year</td>
<td>VI-XII+ Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher's of PTC, CT and B.Ed + Supervision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The annual training capacity of the formal training institutions is about 40,000 including AIOU. In all almost all the institutions, there is a pressing demand for admission in teacher training programmes. In most of the cases, the numbers of applicants to these training programmes are more than the available seats in the Institutions. The staff of the teacher training institutions belongs to education service. There is no special cadre of teacher educators. Any serving teacher or lecturer with a master Degree qualification, with or without professional qualifications, can be appointed as a teacher educator although preference is given to those who holding a Master degree in Education. The Pre-Service teacher training is an essential prerequisite for teaching in primary, middle and secondary schools. However, no pre-service training is required for teaching at higher secondary and degree levels.

Unfortunately, at present there are no arrangements for training of college teachers at country level, which greatly affect the quality of education at this level. Teacher’s induction in the colleges at k-12 and above requires a Master Degree in the relevant subject only. Same is the case at University level. Until very recently Frontier Education Foundation Academy has been established (2003) in Kohat NWFP Pakistan for the In-Service training of College teachers in the Province. This academy is first of its kind in Pakistan. The academy imparts training to improve professional skills of trainee-teachers and administrators of colleges through interactive methodology. A total of 939 individuals including 400 female have received in-service training since December, 2003.

At University level, Staff Development Institutes have been established for in-service training of the university teachers but these institutes are not effective.

**Teacher Training & Education in Higher Education**

**Learning Innovation**

The Division of Learning Innovation at the Higher Education Commission was established in 2003 to promote teaching and learning innovation. Its role to orient, facilitate and support the faculty members of the universities and higher education institutions of Pakistan in pursuance
for excellence in learning resource development, and leadership in the use of technology and strategy in education and training.

The vital mission of the HEC and its LI division is to spearhead the responsibility in becoming the main hub of professional growth of the higher education faculty keeping in view the challenges raised due to the incessant pace of information onslaught. Higher education teacher’s main role is to disseminate and discover useful knowledge, develop professional skills, ethical dispositions and commitment to excellence. It is highly imperative to empower them, with ample background & most updated skills necessary for effective participation in academic research & administrative functioning of the universities introducing an educational culture coming at par with global standards.

The Higher Education Commission and its Learning Innovation Division are very focused and committed to bring about the paradigm shift and promotion of the spirit of inquiry and reflective practice within the faculty to achieve innovative and research based learning. The teaching faculty as change agents, can bring about a national revolution through their collective strategic thinking, develop and implement innovative and creative systems and solutions to serve and transform the society and thus ethically transmit the leadership to the future generation.

Strategic initiatives are under way to develop new ways to support teachers in their professional practice aiming at redevelopment of the Teaching and Learning Exchange Improving Student Outcomes. Through LI collaboration and faculty development programs, teachers can integrate the online resources into their lessons; access professional learning opportunities participate in the piloting of new resources and receive information on the latest research in areas of professional interest. They will be able to collaborate in these activities

**National Academy of Higher Education**

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has brought a revolutionary change through initiating several projects for the professional development of teachers at tertiary level, to bring our higher education at par with international standards.

One major initiative is National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE). Although NAHE started functioning right after its inception in September, 2004, but it obtained its real momentum after completion of the requisite staff at the end of 2005. NAHE aimed to prove a comprehensive academy for the overall professional development of the teachers at higher level. This project has proved its worth by introducing chain of innovative activities across the country among all the universities and degree awarding institutions.
The salient objectives of the project are:

To enhance the standards of teaching and learning throughout higher education in Pakistan by:

- Promoting practices that demonstrate excellent learning outcomes
- Enabling institutions to develop approaches to teaching and learning that encourage a deeper understanding of the student learning needs
- Encouraging collaboration and sharing of good practice so as to enhance the standards of teaching
- Contributing to the information available in the Teaching and learning in higher education sector.

The mentioned objectives were translated into some particular activities/components that were identified for achieving the salient objectives.

The activities/components of the project are:

- Professional Development Activities: Under this component lectures and seminars are conducted for the university teachers regarding different academic issues like:
  - Seminar on ‘Article Writing’
  - Seminar on ‘Learning Styles and Problem Solving’
  - Lecture on ‘Communication Skills’

- Staff Development Courses: This component actually covers almost all of the objectives of NAHE. For providing quality education in the higher education level institutions, it is the dire need of the time to develop skills of all the new and old teachers.

25 human resource centers have been established so far, for providing trainings to the teachers at tertiary level across the country. It was targeted that 3200 teachers will be trained during these courses. The duration of the course is of one month. Rs. 255600/- have been allocated for each course for the training of the university/college teachers. Six training modules Educational Psychology, Curriculum Development, Research Skills, Administration Planning and Communication Skills, Evaluation and Assessment and Teaching Skills and Methodology are developed by the eminent educationists and the contents of these modules are followed by the resource persons during the courses. These training modules cover all the key areas of knowledge and skills that are important for every competent teacher. Likewise in these courses micro teaching sessions are conducted that give an immediate feedback about the teaching competencies of the presenter and suggestions for improvement are followed.

Almost 2000 university/college teachers have been trained so far and 200 are under training. Reports from the resource centers, view of course coordinators, visits of NAHE staff to different centers and above all feedback from the trainees is highly remarkable in terms of achievement of desired goals.
• Grants: To promote research culture among university teachers and to promote more and better research scholars, research grants are available in the project.

• Incorporating Technology in Education: For qualitative improvement of university teacher, two types of technology based courses i.e. ICDL and LTTS are introduced. By doing ICDL the teachers can integrate IT with the subject. While LTTS online courses aim supporting teachers in the design of learner centered instruction and the use of technology to support student inquiry. When the learner does the practical work during these courses, he/she learns principles of learner centered instruction and strategies for using technology.

• Publications: 24000 training modules are designed and published for facilitating the training activities during the training courses.

• National Conferences/International Conferences /Workshops/ Meetings: Conduct of National and International Conferences aim to identify the weaknesses present at higher education level and to design a mechanism to improve them.

• We have planned to conduct a ‘National Conference on Professional Development of Teachers at Higher Education in Pakistan’ in September 2006. Research Papers for the Conference were invited from all the public sector universities and degree awarding institutions of Pakistan. The Advisory Committee scrutinized the abstracts and later on full length papers. Finally 15 papers have been selected in the third meeting of advisory Committee. Now the organizing aspects of the Conference are being finalized.

Faculty Development Program (FDP) 5th, 6th and 7th Faculty Development Programs:
Faculty Development Program is one of the major activities of the Department of Learning Innovation which was designed to acquaint the newly inducted faculty members with the process of teaching and learning. Faculty members found the course helpful as an opportunity to reflect on their current practice as it has improved their understanding of educational principles and approaches, and facilitated their application in day-to-day educational practice. The program has the following seven modules;
1. Research Methodologies
2. Curriculum Planning & Development
3. Testing & Assessment
4. Teaching & Communication Skills
5. Instructional Resources
6. Professional Development
7. International Computer Driving License (ICDL)

Curriculum Based Short Term Training Courses
The National Curriculum Revision Committee of the Higher Education Commission regularly reviews/up dates curricula of almost every disciplines being offered at the graduate and postgraduate level in the universities/colleges Nationwide. To keep abreast the university and degree college teachers with the latest change/enhanced scope of the subject, new concepts/contents incorporated the curricula, and mode of delivery, training of the teachers in
their respective disciplines, through panels of scholar and experts drawn from various educational institutions and user organization is essential.

Learning Innovation Division is to provide opportunity of professional development to the faculty members of public sector universities/degree College in their discipline through short terms training program. The objectives of these training programs are:

- To acquaint the faculty members with the new trends and changes made in the curricula of HEC by NCRC.
- To create motivation through systematic orientation in specified subject and teaching techniques.
- To enable, to acquire knowledge, skills and techniques of efficient teaching.

Curriculum Based Training Courses are among the regular educational activities of the Department. Twelve Training Courses have been successfully organized by the Department of Learning Innovation during the year 2005 – 2006 held in different disciplines and at various public sector Universities of Pakistan. 346 Faculty Members were trained throughout the country.

**Quality Assurance and Teacher Education.**

**Quality assurance** is the systematic review of educational programmes to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained. The objective of quality education is to develop positive and creative thinking power among children and adults to meet their individual and collective lifelong learning needs. Quality education must therefore be seen as an outcome of vision. It carries a notion of transformation, or a series of value added attributes, which culminate in qualitative outcomes. Quality education will enable all Pakistanis to reach their maximum potential as responsible, enlightened and skilled citizens, integrated into the global framework of human centered economic development.

In the Education Sector Reforms Action Plan (2001-05) the strategies of quality improvement and assurance at all levels have been identified and they are:

(a) Benchmarking competencies;

(b) Continuous improvement of curricula;

(c) Professional development of teachers, planners, managers and staff at all levels;

(d) Establishment of National Education Assessment System (NEAS);

(e) Strengthening of teacher training institutions;

(f) Setting academic audit through linkage of grant/incentives with quality;

(g) Increase of non-salary budget for provision of conducive educational environment;
(h) District based educational planning and implementation under the Devolution Plan; and (i) public private partnerships and community participation.

The National Education Policy 1998-2010 gives a comprehensive list of quality inputs i.e. merit based recruitment of teachers, pre-service and in-service training, provision of career structure and system of awards and incentives; introducing learner centered instruction, improving the quality and availability of textbooks and other learning materials, improvement of curriculum, capacity building of various bodies in management and supervision of education, and reforms in examinations and assessment system.

At the culmination of the Ministerial Meeting of the South Asia EFA Forum in May 2003, the Islamabad Declaration, acknowledging that education is the most critical lever for alleviating poverty, empowering people, and to ensure peace, solidarity and prosperity made special provisions for quality in unequivocal terms:

- Commit to provide free, inclusive, gender responsive quality basic education for all including all marginalized and vulnerable groups;
- Commit to improve all aspects of quality of education so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all learners;
- Commit that both quality and access must receive simultaneous attention, and one must not be used as a trade-off against the other;
- Commit to inter-sectoral linkages in general and support to expansion of ECCE in particular as outlined in national Plans of Action and as a critical link to quality learning at the primary level; and to make efforts in ensuring access to ICTs as a cost effective quality learning tool for all students and teachers as we transform towards knowledge-based societies.
- Commit to provide free, inclusive, gender responsive quality basic education for all including all marginalized and vulnerable groups;

What leads to quality in education? The inputs traditionally equated with quality are school expenditures in terms of pupils, teacher quality, teaching practices, school management (Fuller 1987). Quality comprises of both concrete and discrete inputs and processes so that it is seen not just in terms of meeting set goals of competencies / standards, but also relevance to human and environmental needs which are contextual and also ‘something more’ in relation to the pursuit of excellence and human betterment – beyond efficiency and relevance – (Hawes and Stephens 1990: 11). Quality is a complex and multifaceted concept. Basic dimensions of quality education encompass:
Learners who are healthy, well-nourished, and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities;

- Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities;
- Processes through which trained teachers use child-centered teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities;
- Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills, and attitude, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.

The expectations from teachers for delivering quality education are:

- A teacher who is competent in his or her subject and able to present subject matter from a variety of perspectives and strategies
- Competent leadership with manifest concern for accountability (both students and teacher performance), a clear vision of instructional processes and high expectations for educational outcomes
- Effective use of time (the most scarce of resources) to ensure that teachers and students are both in the classroom at the same time and are actively engaged in the teaching-learning process

Teachers education systems require, creative rethinking to tap into a resource ‘ready for change and up gradation’. For too long teachers have been slipping under the heap, in systems which began to under-value them and also where the teachers under-valued themselves. Teachers in the history of mankind have been treated as the ‘Brahmins’ or the most revered of castes. However, since the middle of the twentieth century we have witnessed a loss of status and attrition in standards. The isolation needs to be broken through ‘re-envisioning’ teachers as catalysts and facilitators and not simply as passive narrators of knowledge. They need to be provided new toolkits for effective communication, mastery over content, access to information channels, enabling technologies and approaches. The disconnect found in many countries between training systems and delivery sites needs to be fundamentally removed, ensuring that governance for learning and training is devolved closest to where the need is located. Teachers as catalyst for quality learning are also facilitators of human rights.

Quality assurance in Higher Education of Pakistan

Quality refers to the attainment of standards of resourcing and provision in the higher education sector, and the achievements or outputs of an institution or system. Quality is a multidimensional concept, and it is not possible to arrive at one set of global quality standards against which local institutions can be assessed. Quality embraces all the major functions of higher education: teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, infrastructure and the academic environment. The concept of accountability is closely allied with quality—no system of higher education can fulfill its mission unless it demands the highest quality of itself. Continuous and permanent assessment is necessary to reach this objective. Simultaneously, it is to be ensured that great care is exercised when making quality assessments, as it involves matters of judgment, academic values and cultural understanding.
The issue of quality cannot be dissociated from the quest for excellence and the need to establish evaluation criteria. In order to assess local institutions with a global perspective, reviewing institutions against international quality benchmarks has gained precedence. Such criteria must however be adapted to take into account the diversity of situations, and the academic culture in Pakistan. The need to develop a culture of evaluation is inseparable from the concept of quality, itself intimately bound up with the successful democratization of the higher education system. Standard quality assessment practice involves the comparison between observed and intended outcomes of (programs and institutions) and continuous analysis of the sources of dysfunction. Both internal self evaluation and external review are vital components of any well-developed quality assurance system.

The key factors influencing the quality of higher education is the quality of faculty, curriculum standards, technological infrastructure available, research environment, accreditation regime and the administrative polices and procedures implemented in institutions of higher learning. It is absolutely critical to monitor and regulate growth of sub-standard institutions of higher learning. A comprehensive multi-level mechanism of accreditation is to be developed to ensure provision of quality education. Accreditation needs to occur at the department or program level, as well as the Institutional level.

**QA Agency**

certainty, that the standards of its educational provision are being maintained and enhanced (Quality Assurance Agency UK); Quality has become an in extendible part of augmentation plan of Higher Education espoused by the Higher Education Commission.

Higher Education Commission is moving ahead on the path of tremendous progress in higher learning sector using human and financial resources to increase the access to programs and using all cautions to assure quality of the increased base of higher learning programs.

Quality in higher education is a dynamic entity which is the outcome of interaction among many factors including inter alia, leadership, quality of faculty and students, infrastructure facilities, research and learning environment, governance, strategic planning, assessment procedures, and market force.

- QAA will arrange the capacity building training/seminars and workshops on regular basis to enable the higher education institutions of Pakistan to meet the global challenges of Quality Assurance in higher learning.
- The Agency will develop policies and guidelines to assure that the quality of higher education is improving at the same level and pace within the country.
- Professionals from QAA will serve as master trainer to build capacity in professionals in QECs after receiving their trainings in foreign.
- QAA will also be a monitory and regulatory body to focus on quality and implementation of all desired measures and policies to improve the standards of higher education in Pakistan.
**Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs)**

In the first phase of the Quality Assurance Agency Project approved by DDWP ten Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) at ten various universities will be established, the remaining universities will be catered in the next phases. The QEC will serve as a focal point for Quality Assurance in higher learning.

**Lessons from the Past & Strategies for the Future.**

**Education Sector Reforms**

The Education Sector Reforms (ESR) in essence, build on the 1998-2010 Education Policy and thus are not a new policy innovation but an Action Plan for reform. The ESR is based on a long-term framework with a four year action plan for 2001-2005. The main features of the reform agenda are macro level reforms in planning, procedures, resource mobilization and utilization; sector wide approaches for reinforcement of linkages between sub-sectors (i.e. primary / elementary / non-formal literacy, secondary / technical, higher education and quality assurance structures); internally driven strategies and internally developed milestones for implementation of the ESR; a holistic basis for planning of human resource development in the country; the Social Action Program (SAP is integrated in this approach with 77% of the Action Plan covering SAP and all areas of Education For All (EFA); institutional reforms at all levels, i.e. federal, provincial and district levels to be triggered by the ESR; maximizing equal opportunities and reducing the gender gap at all levels of education; literacy through Education For All for a literate Pakistan is ensured by institution of comprehensive programs supported by the Compulsory Primary Education Ordinance and broad based institutional support; the delivery of quality education at all levels for improving the quality of social capital is to be achieved by rewarding expertise, providing access to improved teacher training programs, curriculum reforms and innovative projects.

To meet the human resource needs of the country, a shift to science and technology is being made at the Secondary and Higher Education levels thereby creating employment options for young men and women. An innovative project of video-textbooks and library is being initiated in collaboration with the AIOU and Ministry of Science and Technology; to bring the educational system at par with international standards, introduction of a three years Masters program is being planned. It is proposed to build public-private partnerships for mobilizing all sections of society in the provision of education through restructured education foundations and other initiatives. The private sector is to be promoted in providing education at all levels especially for higher and professional education through incentive packages and flexible arrangements. A modular approach is being developed for the sub-sector reforms and programs to create space for innovation, testing and expeditious implementation.
**Perspective Development Plan 2001-2011: Objective / Targets**

The Perspective Development Plan 2001-2011 in Education and Training encompasses the following objectives:

- Improvement of literacy rate
- Education for all (EFA)
- Improvement in participation rate at secondary level
- Introduction of technical education at secondary and post-secondary level
- Producing higher education graduates responsive to the socio-economic and technical needs of the country
- Quality education

**Teachers for the 21st century**

National policies have been influenced by the growing realization that teachers have a key role to play in determining the quality of output of educational institutions. Teachers lacking in professional and academic capabilities cannot be expected to contribute to the academic well being of their students. Steps have now been taken to recruit and retain motivated and able individual of both genders. This strategic decision has been supplemented by various reforms that are summarized below:-

i) The curriculum and methods of instruction in teacher training institutions have been reviewed and revised to produce teachers for the twenty first century.
ii) A new stream of technical and vocational training has been introduced in the pre-service teachers training institutions.
iii) Master trainers are being sent for training abroad.
iv) The quality of pre-service teacher training programs is being upgraded by introducing parallel programs of longer duration at post secondary and post degree levels.
v) The Primary Teacher Course (PTC) and Certificate in Teaching (CT) course is being replaced by diploma in education (12+1 ½ year).
vi) To bring PTC / CT teachers at par with diploma holders, 6 months bridging course for in service teachers is being organized.

Assessment of teacher training policies and instruments devolution has led to an institutional disconnect for quality interventions as all decision making lies with the provincial apex training body whilst the training institutions are located in the districts.

a. Quality is the domain of the provinces and brick and mortar work pertaining to rehabilitation and construction of training institutions is with the district governments.
b. There are urgent needs for local or district level teacher education programs to meet the needs of primary, middle, secondary and higher secondary institutions. These cannot be met, as decisions to respond to local training needs have to be referred to provincial headquarters.
c. The institutional provision for professional development varies from province to province characterized by weak financial planning and low resource provision.
d. No standard accreditation process at the provincial and/or national level has been established.
e. Service structure is not unified. Efforts are continuing to overcome the existing deficiencies in the policies and instruments to be used for pre-service and in-service training of teachers and educational managers.
Educational Policy 1998-2010 and Teacher Education

To increase the effectiveness of the system by institutionalizing in-service training of teachers, teacher trainers and educational administrators through school clustering and other techniques. To upgrade the quality of pre-service teacher training programmes by introducing parallel programmes of longer duration at post-secondary and post-degree levels i.e. introduction of programs of FA/FSc education and BA/BSc education. The contents and methodology parts of teacher education curricula will be revised. Both formal and non-formal means shall be used to provide increased opportunities of in-service training to the working teachers, preferably at least once in five years. A special package of incentives package shall be provided to rural females to join the teaching profession. A new cadre of teacher educators shall be created.

Teacher Education/Training Institutions in Pakistan
2004-05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provinces/Regions</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sindh</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWFP</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balochistan</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Area</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FATA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FANA</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJK</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary PAKISTAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>76301</td>
<td>33930</td>
<td>100231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>261945</td>
<td>118315</td>
<td>380260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>338246</td>
<td>192245</td>
<td>530491</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Data does not include teachers employed in educational institutions established and managed by various organizations under the administrative control of Ministries/Divisions of the Federal Government.
Strategies and Operational Program

Strategies and operational program to be followed during 2001-11 include new initiatives to achieve accelerated literacy rate, education for all, better science education facilities, introducing technical stream at secondary level and for higher education and quality assurance are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Operational Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i) Low literacy and participation rates at primary/elementary/secondary level</td>
<td>- Adult Literacy Campaign</td>
<td>- Assisted by Special Task Force on Human Development from August, 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Formal &amp; non Formal System</td>
<td>- Establishment of 30000 Non-formal Schools (including existing 7100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Universal Primary Education</td>
<td>- Opening of 32000 primary schools and up-gradation of 53000 primary schools to elementary level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Universal Secondary Education</td>
<td>- Up-gradation of 19000 elementary schools to secondary level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Low quality of education at all levels</td>
<td>- Improve standard of teachers</td>
<td>- Teacher Training Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Curricula improvement</td>
<td>- Education Testing Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Improve examination system</td>
<td>- Establishment of National Education Assessment System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Universal Secondary Education</td>
<td>- Up-gradation of 19000 elementary schools to secondary level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revamp Science Education</td>
<td>- Revamping of Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Limited option for technical/commercial/ vocational education.</td>
<td>- Introduce technical/vocational stream in secondary schools</td>
<td>- Technical Education Projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education facilities in 3000 existing secondary schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Under perspective 2011, a high level educational profile will be achieved. Physical and teaching facilities will be provided by continuously increasing investment in education and implementing long term Action Plan for Education Sector Reforms. A summary of targets is given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation Rate (%)</th>
<th>Benchmark 2000-01</th>
<th>Target 2003-04</th>
<th>Target 2010-11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Stage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elementary Stage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Higher Education</strong></td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy Rate (%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Perspective Plan 2001-2011 has been prepared under National Education Policy 1998-2010, which recommends enhanced funding to raise literacy level, remove urban-rural and gender imbalances, improve quality of education at all levels, strengthen higher education facilities, and provide for demand driven education. The Education Sector Reforms focus on implementation strategies, program summaries and innovative programs which include proposals of Education For All, poverty reduction, public-private partnership, good governance and re-defining the role of the Federal Ministry of Education for spearheading the reform efforts and mobilization of resources. Perspective 2011 will focus on improving literacy and participation rate through formal and non-formal education system. Girls’ technical and science education will receive special attention. Quality education at all levels will be ensured through better teaching facilities. Curricula will be reviewed. Financial and managerial constraints will be overcome through good governance. New initiatives will include a national education assessment system and introduction of merit through training of teachers.

(a) Literacy

Literacy rate will be increased from 52% at present to 78%. This will be done by expanding Universal Primary Education (UPE). For out of school youth, especially, below 18 years of age, separate programs will be launched. To develop feasible literacy programs performance evaluation for earlier non-formal education programs will provide guidance.

(b) Education for All

UPE for boys will be achieved by 2003 and for girls by 2007. This will be done by providing building to all existing shelter less primary/elementary schools besides provision of additional classrooms in the existing overcrowded schools. Mosque schools will be converted to regular schools and existing primary schools to elementary schools wherever the enrolment so permits. New mosque schools will be established in areas where regular schools may not be feasible. Drop out rate will be reduced by improving the efficiency of the system through better supervision, administration and involvement of local communities at district/tehsil levels. Strong motivational campaign will be launched to persuade parents to send their children to schools. This will be reinforced by legislation for compulsory primary education. Gender and regional imbalance in availability of basic education facilities will be taken care of. Evening shift will be started in areas where feasible. Entry qualification for fresh Primary School Teachers will be raised to Intermediate with one-year teacher training and for Middle School Teachers as Bachelor degree with one-year teacher training to help achieve quality education. Wherever feasible, co-educational primary schools will be established in which female teachers will be appointed.

(c) Secondary Education

Diversification of courses for the students in different stream at this stage is a very crucial task. Democratic access to various career options will be provided at this stage. To accommodate increasing output of elementary graduates a concomitant increase in facilities at secondary level, with focus for girls’ education will be the thrust of Perspective 2011 programs. Upgrading elementary schools, adding classrooms to existing schools and introduction of
technical stream in secondary schools will be the strategy to achieve the target. Private sector will be encouraged to share this responsibility, especially, in setting up of model schools at district level. To improve the quality of secondary education Master degree holders in relevant subjects with degree in education will be recruited as Secondary School Teachers. Intensive in service training will be provided to teachers at least once in five years. Existing science teaching facilities in high schools will be revamped.

(d) Technical Education & Vocational Training

Technical and vocational education will be expanded and diversified courses will be introduced. Provision of multiplicity of options, at close proximity of even rural clientele will be ensured. The out reach will assure accessibility of technical education, vocational training facilities for urban-rural and male-female clientele alike. It will be made in tune with demand in job market. Curricula will be made responsive to the requirements of industry. Linkage with industry will help achieve this goal. At present about 35% of matriculates move into technical, commercial and vocational training which by 2011 will rise to 50%. It is expected that private sector will respond to these initiatives.

(e) Higher Education

State of the art education, in marketable disciplines, will be provided at this level. The intake qualification of teachers will be raised as M. Phil degree for Postgraduate Colleges, and Ph. D for universities. Intensive in service training will be mandatory. Traditional and irrelevant disciplines will be dispensed with or merged with those in other institutions while new emerging and marketable disciplines with focus on research will be introduced. Split PhD training in local universities/institutes in collaboration with foreign universities will be started. A substantial allocation to universities will be made to enhance their research capabilities and start new research programs through provision of better infrastructure facilities and staff development. National Council for Academic Awards and Accreditation will be created for reinforcing the quality of the Private Education System. In fields, where feasible, three year degree course will be introduced. The existing dual control of the universities will be eliminated. Some of the existing universities will be made fully autonomous for which suitable legislative cover will be provided. Special support will be given for developing selected university departments, having potential for up-gradation, as Centers of Excellence, especially in newly emerging scientific fields. Linkage of higher education will be established for knowledge-based industrialization.

In a country where highly talented manpower is available, quality control and research and development activities are almost non-existent, resulting in unimaginable brain drain which requires immediate attention of all concerned. To make optimal use of available highly educated manpower, infrastructure development of the R&D institutions need to be updated with state-of-the-art instruments. Separate allocations will be made for R&D during the Plan. Existing scholarship schemes will be continued. Split Ph.D. training in local universities/institutes in collaboration with foreign universities will be started. Libraries of educational institutions will be strengthened and their proper utilization will be ensured.
Accessibility to modern literature, research based material and information technology will be provided to higher educational & research institutions.

(f) Examination System

Examinations play a pivotal role in improving the quality of education. It is, therefore, necessary to improve quality of examinations, thereby raising general standard of education and checking mal-practice in public examinations. Structural changes in the conduct and quality of examinations are needed to achieve the following objectives. (a) improving intellectual abilities of students, such as knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis and synthesis, (b) ascertaining and enhancing validity, public acceptance, transparency and fairness of examinations; and (c) having a feedback for ensuring continuous assessment of the whole education process by improving teaching strategies, school effectiveness, curriculum design, appropriateness of textbooks and the whole delivery system.

In order to improve the examination system, it is proposed that the Boards shall bring organizational improvements by;

(a) establishing research cells so as to provide feedback for improvement of the system as a whole to conduct research oriented professional activities and to train teachers, paper setters, examiners and invigilation staff,

(b) paper setting cells to develop variety of questions, question papers in different subject,

(c) computerization of process and appointment of well qualified honest, dedicated and experienced staff, preferably on contract basis to ensure fairness, transparency and validity in the examination results. Model question papers will be developed for intellectual assessment of the students. The teachers may be trained; (i) to impart teaching-learning in the class based on these model question papers; and (ii) to test and assess the students on continuous basis. In order to eliminate the element of selective study and at the same time ensuring the comprehension and application skills in a particular subject, the question papers will be so framed that these cover the entire curriculum and not specifically based on one textbook only.

(g) Improving Quality

Quality of education at all level will be improved in order to gain the competitive edge required in the knowledge based global economy. The strategic intervention for this purpose will focus on physical infrastructure, books and equipment, incentive to poor students, national education testing service, establishment of regulatory body for quality assurance (National Council for Accreditation and Quality Assurance), one year honors course after Bachelor’s degree, academy for university teachers, performance based contract appointments, indigenous PhD scholarship programs, increase in non-salary budget of universities and create growing research endowment fund.
(h) Video Textbooks-Libraries

In order to improve the standard of secondary education and specially, in the field of science education it is imperative to have good and innovative science teachers. Together with availability of teachers it is equally necessary that adequate scientific, video text-book libraries be established. These video lessons-libraries will enable the students to improve upon the quality of science education at the secondary level. These efforts will supplement the teaching learning process. Nearly 70% of household in Pakistan have access to TV sets so these video lessons-libraries can be available to the majority of people and to all the students at the secondary level through provision of TV and a video player to all the schools. Out of school students, continuing their study privately, can also take advantage of these lessons through the educational channel as well as by borrowing these videos from the districts and tehsil level resource centers. These videos will not only arouse interest of students in science subjects but will encourage them to innovate, prepare practical models for demonstrating scientific concepts. Educational experts as well as technical facilities of the private sector can be involved in the development of these programs. These lessons/films can also be made available to the private institutions on cost or hiring basis. Similarly, these videos/films can also be provided to the general public through the video shops at subsidized rates.

(i) Tehsil/District Resource Centers

Training and support to quality education provision is an ever increasing need. The service is required through a decentralized process for timely response to needs of the clients i.e. teachers, head teachers, supervisors/learning coordinators and other district education managers. However, in spite of elaborate district level training sites (GCETs and other designated training outposts) there has been insufficient field based support to teachers and education managers. The proposal is to set up 20 Resources Centers integral to the quality component of the Education Sector Reform (ESR) in a phased manner.

(j) Role of Private Sector

During Eighth Plan private sector was encouraged to establish educational institutions and at all levels. As a result, at the school level about 25% students are enrolled in private institutions. At the higher level there are 61 universities/institutions available in private Sector. An inventive driven system will be provided to these institutions to nurture economical, high quality education at all levels in a competitive environment and to further expand private sector’s contribution in the field of education Private Sector partnership with the public sector for better utilization of existing facilities will be encouraged with innovative approaches.

(k) Community Involvement

It is intended to ensure involvement of communities and local bodies to resolve the problems of quality of construction, repair and maintenance of buildings, management of day to day problems of schools located in remote areas, teacher absenteeism, purchase out of non-salary recurrent grants etc. Resources for education sector will be improved through social mobilization, community participation and activating the NGOs, CBOs and local bodies.
Increase in literacy rate will be ensured through continued efforts of public sector, NGOs and communities. The role of communities and NGOs will particularly be focused for setting up new girls institutions in rural areas and urban slums.

(l) Poverty Alleviation

Education is a tool for improving quality of life of the people. It also helps in improvement of earning by producing skilled manpower. Educated workers are more likely to be productive. It is estimated that through UPE, UEE and introduction of vocational and technical subjects at secondary level and through increased participation of matric pass-outs in technical and vocational streams, the country will be able to tackle in some measure the rising incidence of poverty. Output at higher education level will also increase especially in new emerging fields.

(m) Good Governance and Decentralization

Under the devolution and good governance plan district governments will be created with a district based and city based administration for rural and urban areas. Effective decentralization in education requires both macro and micro-level planning to ensure that education facilities work optimally for the benefit of citizens of the district. Whilst the provinces will work out their initial plans for decentralization each district would require technical support for capacity building in a variety of areas to ensure best planning and management systems. Under the current fiscal crisis, it is unlikely that provinces will have sufficient resource initially to support such initiatives. However, it is precisely this level of technical support that is imperative. The Social Action Program (SAP) may be one way of extending this support. However, another incentive could be in the form of innovative Block Grants, through Federal Transfers to lead districts who are keen to mobilize additional resources for better people-centered systems planning. Community participation, partnerships, accountability and monitoring of quality cannot become a reality without effective decentralization.

Quality education: key role of teachers

The World Declaration on Education for All emphasized the role of teachers in the following terms:-

“The pre-eminent role of teachers as well as of other educational personnel in providing quality education needs to be recognized and developed to optimize their contribution, improve their working conditions and status notably in respect to the recruitment, initial and in-service training, remuneration and career development possibilities.” (Article 1.6)

The National Education Policy (1998-2010) regards teachers as the centerpiece of all educational reforms at the grass root level.

The Policy makes the following provision:-

• To increase the effectiveness of the system by institutionalizing in service training of teachers, teacher trainers and educational administrators;
• To upgrade the quality of pre-service teacher training programs by introducing parallel programs of longer duration at post secondary and post degree levels;
• To make the teaching profession attractive to the young talented graduates by developing a package of incentives;
• To revise the curriculum and methods of instruction in teachers training institutes to bring them in line with the requirements of prevailing trends in this field;
• To create a new cadre of teacher educators. Quality learning cannot be expected without quality inputs. In the context of public primary education in Pakistan about 71% schools are located in rural areas.

The position in case of other Provinces can be termed as no better than that of Punjab. It may even be worse in case of the rural areas of other Provinces. In a preparatory document prepared by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with UNESCO in May 2003, a general picture of inputs in public schools has been portrayed as under:

- Provisions in primary schools particularly the rural primary schools are very poor.
- Nearly 1/6 of the primary schools are shelter less.
- The schools with building have insufficient accommodation – 2 rooms and a veranda.
- Students mostly sit on mats/tat.
- Per school average number of teachers is 2.35.
- In mosque schools the average number of teachers is 1.3 per school.
- Textbooks for teachers: Never provided.
- Teaching Kit: Supplied in mid seventies. Never updated or repaired.
- Teachers hesitate to use it due to fear of breakage.
- Copy of curriculum: Never provided.
- Resource Materials: Never provided.
- Community support is very low, but is being sought through various I. Modes. micro levels;

ii. Encouraging optimum professional and pedagogic development;

iii. Expanding IT literacy in sub-sectors of education and IT based classroom teaching practices; and

iv. Undertake the above through partnerships across government, private sector and civil society for efficient, inclusive and maximum spread of ICTs.

**Capacity building and pedagogy:**

- INTEL has completed training of 38,000 government teachers and master trainers in 2003.
- The Academy of Education Planning and Management (AEPAM) is also training district education managers from all over the country in basic ICT skills to create a basis for e-governance.
- Development of online and CD Rom based courses in Science, English, Urdu and Maths is well underway through private sector initiatives in software.
- Radio, video textbooks and education television programs with enhanced transmission time are also being promoted in existing and planned schemes.
- All 208 teacher training institutions across the country will be equipped with IT labs as part of the program to upgrade these training
- Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) has already launched a major IT initiative supported by a wide area network for staff training.
- In tertiary education a more vigorous and comprehensive IT driven regime is fully underway. This has been facilitated by the higher education reform program under the Higher Education Commission (HEC).
Needs for a Holistic Approach
Though teacher education is the most critical process in preparing teachers, there is a limitation by itself. To make teacher education effective, capable persons must be recruited into the training programs. To attract capable persons to teaching, the profession must have considerably high status both socially and economically. Then, quality programs must be provided at the pre-service stage. Furthermore, opportunities for in-service education and professional development must be ensured to enable teachers to constantly upgrade their knowledge and skills. These are all interrelated and, in this sense, a holistic approach is required to prepare and develop competent teachers.

1. Educational Shifts Affecting Teachers
- From ‘schooling’ to life-long education: impossibility to teach everything supposed to be useful for the student’s life
- From ‘teaching’ to ‘learning’: Teachers losing monopoly on information/knowledge teacher to develop competency for learner-centered education
- Functions of teachers multiplied and wider range of skills required of teachers (e.g. teaching multi-grade classes)
- Increasing attention to quality implying for upgraded teacher qualifications and more rigorous certification
- Higher level of educational attainment required of entering teachers
- Decentralization leading to increasing participation of teachers in decision-making and to increased accountability for outcomes and efficiency
- Economic crisis/stagnation in many countries leading to declining economic status (low salary) of teachers,
- Demographic changes requiring long-term planning of teacher supply:
- Shifting balance between preparing teachers for implementing mandated curriculum and preparing teachers for effective response to diversified students’ learning needs and for other aspects of teacher life
- Reorganization of pre-service teacher education (curricular renewal; strengthened practice teaching; compulsory learning of multi-media delivery of education, etc.)
- Strengthening in-service teacher training: (mandatory periodical continued education; concurrent re-certification; opportunities/incentives to participate; from large-scale national programme to short-duration school-based training; structure of career development rewards)
- Developing professional profile of teachers and improve teachers’ qualifications (“to equip teachers with ethical, intellectual and emotional wherewithal to develop the same range of qualities in their pupils, as society demands”)
- Increasing gender equality and change in the feminization of the teaching profession (proportion of female teachers; women in school administrative/managerial positions; role modeling of teaching)
- More active participation of teachers in education reform: Promoting the central role of teachers in planning/carrying out reforms as agents of change
Changing Contexts of Teacher Education

1. From an instrumental view of education (training for skills as instrument for productivity) to an encompassing humanistic view of learning for the development of a ‘complete person’ in all the richness of the personality: ‘Learning to be’
2. From developing part of intellectual faculty to fully tap the talents and potentials of human personality.
3. Teaching for creativity and adaptability to change in an uncertain future
4. Teaching for continued learning throughout life in a learning society
5. Teaching for living together in peace and harmony in an increasingly globalize world

Changing Roles of Teachers

Education providing simultaneously ‘the compass that will enable people to find their way in it’: Teacher as guide to learning aims, pathways and approaches. Education providing “maps of a complex world in constant turmoil”: Teacher as guide to multiple sources of information and knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching as an occupation</td>
<td>Teaching as a profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sole source of information</td>
<td>One of multiple sources of information and knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An ‘authority’ of knowledge and a mentor of learners</td>
<td>A learning coach, a friend, and a guide in exploring and discovering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A craftsman in teaching</td>
<td>An artist and a scientist in teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A duck-filling transmitter of factual Knowledge</td>
<td>A facilitator of learning not only knowledge but skills and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching the book</td>
<td>Teaching the person, mind &amp; heart: an example setter and a role model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A ‘chalk-talk’ lecturer</td>
<td>A specialist in teaching with new Technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A ‘solitary’ worker and ‘soloist’ in Teaching</td>
<td>A team member and an ‘accompanist’ in interactive learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A worker confined within school walls</td>
<td>An active worker in community service and a parents partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A ‘permanent teacher’</td>
<td>A lifelong learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A passive conservative force of inertia against change</td>
<td>a proactive agent of change and an active participant in transformation of education</td>
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Concluding Remarks

New approaches are needed to resolve existing and imminent gaps in the quantity and quality of teachers. It is clear that qualifications alone do not make an effective teacher. Poor instruction and learning reduces the demand for education, which, in turn, reduces the pool of qualified teachers. Quality education requires motivated and competent teachers at all levels. It is recommended that intake qualification of teachers at all levels be enhanced. Teacher training institutions are revamped to ensure output of devoted prospective teachers. The existing teachers should undergo intensive in-service training to improve their working efficiency. Management training will be mandatory for all future administrators of education from secondary school levels to higher education levels. Awards and medals shall be given to hardworking and devoted teachers.

All that is said about pursuits of quality transaction for teacher preparation is not explicated in stage specific manner. These would have to be worked out in differential forms. Also, such tasks for qualitative improvement in TE must be viewed as collective pursuits. For instance, courses at Master’s level (M.Ed. & M.A.), Ph.D. (Education) should be geared to contribute towards such goals of seeking theorization about educational practices and to develop effective practices.

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The paper focuses on the problems of assessment of students’ learning outcomes within the quality assurance system of a large country with a great number of educational institutions. The use of benchmarking mechanisms to evaluate and monitor students’ achievement with the help of information communication technologies is looked at. The authors argue that benchmarking assisted by information technology increases efficiency and transparency of the national quality assurance system.

Modern trends in the development of higher education on a global scale bring an external focus on quality assessment of graduates’ training. In Russia the evaluation of higher education institutions (HEIs) is carried out on the national level by the National Accreditation Agency (Russia) and includes four stages: development of procedures and methods, self-evaluation, a site visit, accreditation decision-making. The quality assessment of students’ training within a higher education institution is implemented during self-evaluation and a site visit.

The quality of students’ training is evaluated on the basis of testing, which is used to measure the achievements of a HEI against agreed benchmarks. This procedure requires considerable financial expenditures and time-consuming efforts, namely: development of testing materials, training of faculty (staff) capable to not only conduct testing procedures but also to appropriately analyze and interpret the results. However the use of varied testing materials as well as different time of testing prevent from achieving objective compatibility with other HEIs and even with the State Educational Standards – the main threshold criteria in Russia.

In this light the development of a unified database of testing materials and unified technology of data processing will help HEIs in carrying out their self-evaluation procedures. This approach provides greater fairness and transparency of the evaluation procedures, involving the academic community into the process; it also provides greater independence of evaluation procedures both from the education authorities and institutions. The National Accreditation Agency of the Russian Federation (NAA) encourages HEIs to use the benefits of testing students via Internet – the Internet exam.

During the Internet exam students studying the same educational program from all HEIs of Russia take a unified test at the same time. As an effective benchmarking tool it also helps to analyze the learning productivity of a predefined program by means of modern information communication technologies.

The Internet-exam is underpinned by the following principles:
- The procedure is carried out by means of ITC technologies.
- HEIs take part in the Internet-exam on a voluntary basis, determining the scope and mode of conducting (on-line/off-line).
- The NAA gives high credence to HEIs in organization and implementation of the Internet-exam. The results of testing are confidential and are returned to the HEI to be used for self-evaluation. This approach was widely approved by the academic community.
• The Internet-exam is held twice a year all over the country (as a rule before or after winter and summer examination sessions) and not only for graduates but also for the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year students.
• The Internet-exam has in place a system of consolidated feedback: the Internet technology of data processing developed by the NAA makes it possible to compile an information and analytical chart for each HEI and educational program. The chart shows the compliance of the HEI/educational program with the State Educational Standards and analyzes students’ outcomes within a single HEI compared to other participating HEIs realizing similar programs. This additionally enables relative comparison of the program quality within a single HEI against all other similar programs in the country (cross-institutional comparative analysis).
• The outcomes of the Internet-exam are processed within a short period of time: the information and analytical chart is received by a HEI a month after the Internet-exam is over.
• All the stakeholders involved in the process are interested in the outcomes of the Internet-exam:
  o students: assessment of one’s own achievements; teachers: to identify and improve areas of “weakness” in the learning process;
  o HEIs’ management: the use of the outcomes for self-evaluation and external review as well as quality management of staff training;
  o parents: organization of the learning process in compliance with the requirements of the State Educational Standards;
  o a HEI as a whole: avoiding stressful situations arising from unexpected check-outs;
  o employers, tutorial council: the competitiveness of the educational programs within a single institution on the Russian educational market;
  o the Federal Service of Supervision in Education and Science: the assessment of the learning process as a whole on the national level, favourable attitude on the part of the academic community.
• One of the objectives of the Internet-exam is to assess the minimum, basic level of students’ training. Thus it should not be considered as a complete examination procedure or an alternative to the regular exam but as a supplement to the procedure.

According to the statistics in May 2005, 58 HEIs and branches\(^1\) from 31 regions of Russia\(^2\) participated in the Internet-exam; in December 2005 – 179 HEIs including branches from 51 regions took part in the procedure. In May 2006 the Internet-exam was held in 77 regions of Russia involving 458 HEI and branches. The number of disciplines increased from 4 in May 2005 to 17 in May 2006, whereas the number of students engaged in the process grew from 15,5 thousands to 389 thousands. 42% of the outcomes were obtained on-line. In December, 2006 more than 1300 HEIs including branches and over 0,5 million students took part in the Internet-exam.

Though operating technology is aimed at assisting HEIs in preparing for self-evaluation procedures and a site visit, it can be a relevant link in establishing internal quality assurance systems. It enables regular quality monitoring of students’ outcomes and program benchmarking as well as continuous improvement of the learning process.

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1 Nowadays in Russia there are about 1 400 HEIs, more than 2 000 branches of HEIs, with about 30 000 study programs, about 2 500 vocational schools and 300 institutions of further vocational training.
2 The Russian Federation consists of 88 regions.
One of the principles of the Bologna process\(^3\) is the demonstration of high level standards of students’ training not only for the education authorities but also for all stakeholders (academic community, parents and employers). Thus the Internet-exam can be used to implement this principle.

Hence, the benchmarking mechanisms are used on the national level for quality evaluation of a single program rather than of an individual student’s outcomes. Benchmarking is certainly an effective quality assurance tool which can be used to monitor and improve education quality in a HEI.

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\(^3\) The Bologna process was initiated in 1998. By now 45 European countries have signed the Bologna Declaration.
Abstract:

INQAAHE’s membership has grown from 11 in 1991 to at least 74 countries in 2006. This portends a large and growing number of professional staff from a wide range of backgrounds entering a new profession without adequate preparation. There appears to be general agreement that there is a profession in quality assurance; however, only informal training or exchange programs exist for professional development purposes. Missing is a formal, internationally recognized credential for quality assurance professionals at the graduate level. Leaders of the INQAAHE community and members of the teaching staff at the College of Education at the University of Cincinnati (a major public institution of US higher education located in Cincinnati, Ohio) would like to discuss the potential of a Certificate Program in Quality Assurance (3-6 month program) embedded in a Masters Program in Educational Leadership (12-18 month program) which would be open to quality assurance professionals from throughout the globe.
**Background**

For most countries of the globe, the “profession” of quality assurance in higher education has emerged since the early 1990’s (and even more recently for postsecondary education, including vocational and technical training). With the growth of national systems of quality assurance have come a plethora of professional development opportunities: national, regional and international training programs; conferences; staff exchanges; and internships to name a few. But missing from these programs is a formalized, internationally recognized credential which quality assurance professionals can claim as their own.

It has been said that the maturity of a profession is evidenced in the existence of such elements as:

- A clearly defined curriculum for professional education and a qualified teaching staff
- The means of assuring the quality of the educational program (audit, accreditation, etc.)
- A means of assuring the competency of the student upon graduation (certification or licensure); and
- Provision for the continuing education and professional development of the professional.

Although there is general agreement that quality assurance is a profession, virtually none of these elements characterize the current state of our affairs. Most of us in the profession have evolved naturally through teaching, administrative or governmental ranks with a full range of first degree specialties. And it is certainly conceivable that the profession can continue doing well assuming that these underpinning degrees adequately prepared one for a range of life professions which are unpredictable.

INQAAHE’s country membership has grown from 11 in 1991 to at least 74 countries in 2006. This portends a large and growing number of professional staff from a wide range of backgrounds entering a new profession without adequate preparation. Even established quality assurance organizations tell us that they do not have the time to properly prepare their new professionals, so newly established organizations have to rely on self-education and the occasional training program provided at a regional or international gathering. The process of training can be a long one.

For some years, “veteran” members of the INQAAHE community have discussed the potential of a credential which focuses on the needs of the quality assurance professional. One thinks of some of the following subject areas which could be particularly helpful to learn with particular sensitivity to global best practice:

- Principles of higher education administration/leadership
- Teaching and learning effectiveness
- The fundamentals of evaluation and assessment
- Information systems (data base development; statistics; etc.)
• Theory and practice in global quality assurance
• The economics (and relevance) of education (eg, the relationship between a quality higher education system and a healthy national economy)

Some of these areas can be taught over a relatively short period of time (3-6 months) for a Certificate program. For participating in such a program, the individual would receive a Certificate from an accredited and internationally recognized graduate school in the discrete area of Quality Assurance (or Accreditation for geographical regions such as the United States).

A Certificate program can stand alone or can be embedded in a Masters Degree program in, for example, Educational Leadership, which can be taught over a 12 to 18 month period. For participating in such a program, the individual would receive a Masters degree in Educational Leadership with the addition of a Certification in Quality Assurance from an accredited and internationally recognized graduate school in the discrete area of Quality Assurance (or Accreditation for geographical regions such as the United States).

Leaders of the INQAAHE community and members of the teaching staff at the College of Education at the University of Cincinnati (a major public institution located in Cincinnati, Ohio) would like to discuss the potential of such a Certificate and Masters program with members of INQAAHE at the biennial conference in Toronto in early April, 2007. Following the conference, information related to this program will be posted to the University of Cincinnati website www.cehc.uc.edu/inqaahe.php.

The session will be in two parts: the first to outline what the Certificate-Masters programs can look like; and the second to have a full discussion with the participants. In preparation for such a session, it is feasible that a simple survey be distributed to INQAAHE member organizations in advance of the Toronto conference to determine initial interest and specific feedback to a formal recognized credential for quality assurance professionals worldwide.
1. Higher Education Reform

Thailand has a large and comprehensive higher education system, comprising both public and private sectors, and both degree granting and sub-degree institutions. At present, higher education is under the supervision of nine different ministries. Currently there are 811 institutions, not counting branch campuses. A total of 194 are degree-granting institutions (130 under the Ministry of Education (MOE) and 64 under the other eight ministries); 617 sub-degree institutions (564 under the Ministry of Education and 53 under the other eight ministries). There are 130 universities; 66 regular public universities, 6 autonomous public universities, 51 private universities, five public specialized institutes, and two open public universities.

In 2004, the higher education system had a total of 1,891,730 students studying in institutions classified as degree-level institutions, of whom 79 percent were studying at degree level. The percent of students from public institutions is 80. Nearly one-quarter of the higher education age group is enrolled in higher education institutions, not including open universities.

Thailand began a process of reform of higher education in the late 1980s when the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA) prepared the first 15-year Higher Education Plan covering the period 1990 to 2004. The 8th National Higher Education Plan for the period 1997 to 2001 indicated that one of the six main policy directions would relate to quality and excellence. New quality assurance policies and guiding directions were announced in July 1996, and these stipulated that all universities improve and enhance their efforts for achieving quality of instruction and an appropriate academic learning environment. One of the main principles articulated was that all higher education institutions will establish quality management systems and work consistently to improve their performance. Subsequent important steps included establishing procedures for internal and external quality assurance, developing manuals, running some pilot audits, and establishing performance indicators.

These efforts were followed by the 1999 National Education Act, which legislated for extensive and comprehensive educational reforms affecting both public and a private education sectors. The MOE, the MUA, and the Office of the National Education Commission were emerged into a new Ministry of Education. The Commission of Higher Education, the only legal entity, shall be responsible for proposing policies, development plans and standards for higher education in line with the National Education Act; Mobilization of resources; monitoring; inspection; and the evaluation of the provision of higher education (Section 45). The public sector’s role in higher education is to be changed.
from being regulatory to supervisory, while the mission of higher education is being
redirected more toward societal participation, student-centered learning, and life-long
learning. In 2002, all public universities will gain increased autonomy. According to Section
36, the state educational institutions providing education at the degree level shall be legal
entities and enjoy the status or state supervised agencies. These state higher education
institutions shall enjoy autonomy; be able to develop their own system of administration and
management; have flexibility; academic freedom and be under supervision of the councils of
the institutions and in accord with the foundation acts of the respective institutions.

2. Quality Assurance Initiatives

With regard to quality assurance, the 1999 National Education Act required the established of
a new system of quality assurance and assessment for higher education, which includes both
internal and external reviews (Section 47). The recently established Office for national
Education Standards and Quality Assessment is responsible for development of criteria and
methods of external evaluations (Section 49). All educational institutions are required to
receive an external quality assessment at least once every five years, and the results are to be
submitted to the relevant agencies and made available to the public. Educational institutions
are required to prepare appropriate documentation and evidence and arrange for their
personnel, governing bodies, parents, and others to provide additional information at the
request of ONESQA and external agencies certified by ONESQA for conducting external
assessment (Section 50).

In case where an external assessment shows that an educational institution has not met the
standard required, ONESQA must submit a report to the parent organization recommending
corrective action to improve performance. In cases where corrective measures are not
implemented, ONESQA is required to report detail to government agencies. "Parent
organizations" with jurisdiction over higher educational institutions (ministries in the case of
public institutions, and owners in the case of private institutions) and the institutions
themselves, are responsible for establishing quality assurance systems and undertaking
internal reviews (Section 51).

While private education institutions will continue to enjoy independence, they will follow the
same rules for assessment of educational quality and standards as those for state education
institutions.

Considerable progress has been made with implementation. ONESQA was established by a
royal decree in October 2000, and senior staff members have taken up their appointments.
ONESQA is required to perform a wide range of functions regarding development of the
external assessment system, including establishing criteria for external assessment.

3. Higher Education Quality Assurance

3.1 Internal Quality Assurance (IQA)

The Commission on Higher Education has focused on the IQA system. It has
announced 9 aspects of quality factors: 1) philosophy, mission, objectives and
implementation plan; 2) teaching/learning provision; 3) student development
activities; 4) research; 5) academic service to community; 6) preservation of art and
culture; 7) administration and management; 8) finance and budgeting; 9) and QA
system and mechanisms. The IQA system consists of quality control, quality audit
3.2 External Quality Assurance (EQA)
Quality assurance for basic and higher education is the responsibility of ONESQA. External quality assessment will be conducted through the initial inspection of annual reports, as well as other reports resulting from internal quality assurance of the educational institutions. External evaluators, certified by ONESQA, will review documents, evidence and data, and visit educational institutions in accordance with the assessment process. The expert-oriented approach, or peer review, with realistic assessment has been adopted in the EQA for higher education. (See figure 2-5)

- 3.2.1 Criteria in developing KPI
The key performance indicators have been developed and used in External Quality Assurance for higher Education by the following criteria:
1. They should clearly indicate successful results from management following the principles, objectives and educational management guidelines given in the National Education Act of 1999, particularly on the efforts of the university for educational reform in line with the NEA Objectives.
2. They should clearly indicate an application of the factors, processes, and results of education management which comply with the objectives and principles of the higher education standards set up by the ministry of university affairs.
3. They should not be numerous, but significant, clear, and widely accepted within the higher education institutions/universities as key indicators in evaluating work performance according to the mission statements in each academic area.
4. They should apply to the types and variations of higher educational institutions.

- 3.2.2 The Standards and Key Performance Indicators
The standards and indicators to be used for external assessment for higher education institutions have been developed continuously from the first round to the second round. On the first round (2000-2005), the assessment system was stressed to serve the objectives as stated below;
1. It was all about improving the education quality, not judging, finding-fault or giving a merit-punishment.
2. It aimed at the straightforwardness, fairness, transparency, evidence-based support and accountability.
3. It aimed at the support and coordination in the Amicable manner, rather not mandating.
4. It encouraged all stakeholders to involve in the assessment process and system.
5. It aimed at the balancing between the academic freedom and the nation’s education goal as stated in National Education Act 1999, which allowed the
higher education institution to have the flexibility in functioning. The institution thus could establish their own objectives and further develop the education quality with respect to the institution’s and student’s capability.

For the second round (2006-2010), the standards and criteria would be more intensive by taking the prior-experience to develop the realistic assessment in order to reflect the real situation of higher education institutions.

ONESQA’s Quality Standards are the 4 aspects of quality standards, namely effectiveness, administration, learning, and quality assurance divided into 7 categories, 48 indicators, and specified by ONESQA. The first four standards are result-oriented, while standards 5-7 are process-oriented. Each standard is consisted of a number of common and specific indicators, to be used according to the emphasis points and identity of the institution, as in Table 1.

Table 1 ONESQA’s Quality Standards for the second round assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>No. of indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Quality of Graduates</td>
<td>At least 20</td>
<td>6+2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Research and Innovations</td>
<td>At least 20</td>
<td>5+2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Academic Services</td>
<td>At least 20</td>
<td>4+3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Arts and Cultures Preservation</td>
<td>At least 20</td>
<td>2+2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Standard 1-4</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>17+9</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Organization and Human Resources Development</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Curriculum and institution</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Quality Assurance System</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Standards 5-7</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Standards 1-7</strong></td>
<td><strong>160</strong></td>
<td><strong>39+9</strong>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* unique indicator

**Standard 1 Quality of Graduates**

Graduates are intellectual, capable of self-learning and self-development, and working with others. They possess professional skills and knowledge of highly recognized professionals, research skills of highly recognized academics, and conscience and ethics of good citizens of the Thai society and the world community.

1.1 Percentage of Bachelor graduates who can secure jobs and who can be self-employed within one year
1.2 Percentage of Bachelor graduates who work in their major field of study
1.3 Percentage of Graduates getting their starting salaries by the standard
1.4 Levels of satisfaction of employers/business operators/ graduate users
1.5 Number of students or alumni who graduated not more than 3 years ago who are recognized academically/ professionally/ ethically or number of academic awards or other awards related to the quality of graduates at the national or international level within the past 3 years (number of students)
1.6 Number of theses/ dissertations and students’ academic works awarded at the national or international level within the past 3 years (number of works)
1.7 Percentage of articles based on the Master graduates theses that are published in
proportion to the total number of the Master graduates’ theses

*1.8 Percentage of articles based on the Doctoral graduates’ dissertations that are published in proportion to the total number of the Doctoral graduates’ dissertations

Standard 2 Research and Innovation
Research and innovations lead to the creation and development of highly skilled human resources, the creation and development of new body of knowledge which expands the borders of knowledge, and the applicability of intellectual property. They are important factors which develop the quality, effectiveness and competency of the Thais and develop the Thai society into a society of learning, knowledge and wisdom, in calculating a culture of utilizing knowledge in determining the trends of development as well as enhancing the country’s competitiveness.

2.1 Percentage of research and innovations published, disseminated and/or used at the national and international levels in proportion to the total number of full-time lecturers
2.2 Amount of research and innovation funds in proportion to the total number of full-time lecturers
2.3 Amount of external research and innovation funds in proportion to the total number of full-time lecturers
2.4 Percentage of full-time lecturers receiving internal research or innovation funds in proportion to the total number of full-time lecturers
2.5 Percentage if full-time lecturers receiving external research or innovation funds in proportion to the total number of full-time lecturers

*2.6 Percentage of research articles cited in the refereed journals or the national or international databases (e.g. ISI, ERIC) in proportion to the total number of full-time lecturers

*2.7 Number of research and innovations registered as intellectual property or patented in proportion to the total number of full-time lecturers within the past 5 years

Standard 3 Academic Services
Academic and professional services are rendered useful and serve as reliable academic and professional resources, present appropriate and relevant guidelines which enhance the security and strength of the society, community, country and the international community. They also promote the university’s academic and professional roles in developing the learning society and knowledge society with responsibility for the public.

3.1 Percentage of academic and professional service activities/projects responding to the needs of and developing strengthening the society, community, country and the international community in proportion to the total number of full-time lecturers.
3.2 Percentage of full-time lecturers serving as thesis advisors and thesis committee members in other institutions and serving as academic and professional committee members at the national level in proportion to the total number of full-time lecturers
3.3 Use of the knowledge and experiences derived from the academic and professional services to development the teaching and learning and research
3.4 University expenses incurred in case and in kind in providing academic and professional services to the society in proportion to the total number of full-time lecturers

*3.5 Number of academic and professional services centers, nationally or internationally recognized

*3.6 University revenues generated from providing academic and professional services in the name of the university in proportion to the total number of full-time lecturers

*3.7 Level of success in providing academic and professional services according to the university’s mission

Standard 4 Art and Cultures Preservation
Thai identity, art, culture, wisdom and local wisdom which are Thai heritage are preserved developed, disseminated, and integrated into the teaching and learning processes, research and academic and professional services. Thai wisdom is created and promoted to be the foundation of the development of body of knowledge which can be internationalized.

4.1 Percentage of activities preserving, developing and enhancing Thai identity, art and culture in proportion to the total number of full-time students

4.2 Percentage of University expenses incurred in case and in kind in the preservation, development and enhancement of Thai identity, art and culture in proportion to the total operation budget

*4.3 Number of pieces of works resulting in the development of the body of knowledge and the creation of the standard of art and culture

*4.4 Effectiveness of the preservation, development and enhancement of Thai identity, art and culture

Standard 5 Organization and Human Resources Development
Based on good governance, education is administered and managed with the participation of all members of the organization as well as its stakeholders. Focus is placed on decentralization, monitored by systematic and continuous policies, planning, leadership, and human resources development. Information system is used in teaching and learning, research and administration with the aim of establishing academic excellence and financial security. The use of money is worthy, autonomous, flexible, transparent and can be audited.

5.1 University council and executives have the vision that drives the mission, and that reflects its policies and objectives, leading to the goal of good administration, with participative management style, emphasizing on empowerment, transparency, and adaptability, as well as the ability to sustain the institution to compete in the international arena

5.2 Development the institution to become a learning organization by making use of both internal and external audits

5.3 The strategic plan are aligned with the national strategies (Level)

5.4 Sharing of both internal and external resources

5.5 Capability of database systems for management, teaching and learning, and research
5.6 Fixed assets in proportion to the total number of full-time students
5.7 Operating expenses in proportion to the total number of full-time students
5.8 Percentage of net income in proportion to the total operation budget
5.9 Percentage of full-time lecturers participating in academic conferences or presenting academic works in the country and abroad
5.10 Budget per head for full-time lectures’ development in the country and abroad in proportion to the total number of full-time lectures
5.11 Percentage of full-time supporting staff who were developed in professional knowledge and skills in the country and abroad

Standard 6 Curriculum and Instruction
Curriculum are developed to be updated, flexible and relevant to the learners’ and the society’s needs. The teaching and learning process focuses on the development of learners’ quality, focusing on self-learning according to their needs and interests through the use of different teaching techniques and resources. Learning evaluation is done in real situations and the results are used for learners’ development. Human resources, budget, infrastructure, facilities and cooperation from within and outside the organization are pooled to organize extra-curriculum and educational activities to attain the highest level of effectiveness of educational management.

6.1 Percentage of curriculums meeting the standard criteria in proportion to the total number of curriculums
6.2 Number of full-time students in proportion to the total number of full-time lecturers
6.3 Percentage of full-time lecturers holding Doctoral degrees or equivalent in proportion to the total number of full-time lecturers
6.4 Percentage of full-time lecturers holding academic titles
6.5 Compliance with the teaching professional ethnics
6.6 Learning process with emphasis on student-centered approach, and the promotion of student development.
6.7 Student’s satisfaction in teaching effectiveness and learning facilities and support.
6.8 Percentage of students participated in student development activities or projects per student.
6.9 Operating expenses in the library system, computers and information center in proportion to the total number of full-time students

Standard 7 Quality Assurance System
Internal quality assurance means the quality development, quality auditing and quality assessment. It is a part of the educational administration process that leads to the continuous development of education quality and standard and serves the external quality assurance.

7.1 There exist an internal Quality Assurance system and mechanism that bring about continuous development of education quality
7.2 Effectiveness of the internal Quality Assurance
In conclusion, major efforts are currently underway to implement a new quality assurance system in Thailand for both public and private sectors of higher education. ONESQA was established by a royal decree to be responsible for the external assessment model have been adopted for the external quality assessment of higher education institutions in Thailand. The certification of quality and standards for the purpose of developing higher education institutions, based on the 7 standards with 48 performance indicators, (39 common KPIs, and 9 unique KPIs). External reviews of higher education institution started in mid-2002, and ONESQA is required to complete the reviews of all higher education institutions for the second round assessment in 2010.

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Abstract

This paper outlines the major reforms underway in the Sultanate of Oman’s higher education quality management system. Oman’s higher education sector has developed from nothing in 1970 to 23 private and over 20 public higher education providers by 2007. In order to satisfy the demands of a young and growing sector, many programs have been imported from other countries, along with their corresponding quality assurance policies and systems. Oman is currently in the process of consolidating these gains through the establishment of a comprehensive national quality management system. This paper outlines the key elements of that system, including infrastructural policies; institutional quality assurance standards and processes; program quality assurance standards and processes; and quality enhancement activities. In particular, it describes how the whole Omani higher education sector is being involved in the reforms in order to achieve genuine improvements in capability, and to maximize the social legitimacy of the system.

Introduction and History

The story of higher education\(^1\) in the Sultanate of Oman is one of phenomenal progress from a recent bloomer. A significant new chapter is currently being written.

Oman is a developing country with a population of over 2.5 million. Nearly half the population are children or teenagers\(^2\). This youthful population phenomenon is, in part, a consequence of Oman’s recent economic and political history. Since the discovery of oil in the late 1960s, and the assumption of the throne by his Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said in 1970, Oman has experienced a major transition from a domestically focused country to an international trader of high value processed commodities (most notably oil and gas products). The combination of steep population growth, economic growth and the opening of Oman to the international community has resulted in a massive and rapid increase in demand for higher education.

\(^1\) Note that Oman has “technical education”, “vocational education” and “higher education”. However, these terms are not precisely defined, and higher education is often used to refer to all postsecondary education (the term post-compulsory education does not apply, as education is not compulsory in Oman). In this paper, higher education will refer to all postsecondary education unless stated otherwise.

Prior to 1970 there had been no formal higher education. The 1970s and 1980s were marked by the development of government-run colleges and institutes, primarily offering vocational (up to certificate level) and technical (up to undergraduate diploma level) programs. These mainly focused on the national priorities of technology, business, health and teaching. The colleges continue today, and the offerings have expanded somewhat.

A major development occurred in 1986 with the inauguration of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), a comprehensive public university. Today, SQU is Oman’s premier higher education provider and has over 10,000 students studying programs up to Masters level in seven colleges. Nonetheless, SQU on its own could not accommodate the growing demand for higher education places.

In the mid 1990s, a major strategic shift was implemented. Mindful that it had neither the capacity nor capability to develop and deliver sufficient higher education opportunities to meet the needs of a youthful and growing population, Oman started importing higher education in earnest. The principal delivery mechanism was to establish privately owned local colleges and universities, offering mainly imported diploma and degree programs from the United Kingdom and the United States of America (and, more recently, Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany, India, Jordan, Lebanon, New Zealand, The Netherlands, and Portugal). There are currently over 200 diploma and degree programs, sourced from 12 countries, being offered through 23 private higher education providers (HEPs). All these figures are expanding.

One of the consequences is that Oman imported not only a diverse range of educational opportunities, but also a diverse range of quality assurance systems, including wide variances in standards, data, approval mechanisms, transnational quality assurance mechanisms and transparency. None of these were borne from the Omani context, and the extent to which they have been specially tailored for that context is variable. This has led to a range of issues including differing credit systems that impede credit transfer; inconsistent/incompatible entrance standards; difficulties in nationally collecting common data for strategic management purposes; and jurisdictional confusion for regulatory and external quality assurance bodies.

These process problems are functional manifestations of a far more significant matter. Higher education is a means by which a country shapes the type of society it desires. The selection of programs, the student learning standards and the embedded ethics and other graduate attributes are all critical factors in the development of a nation. This is perhaps taken for granted in a larger, developed country where the immediate impact may be less pronounced, but in a smaller, developing country like Oman its importance looms large. If a country does not have effective control over the quality assurance of higher education, then its ability to shape its society is constrained.

3 The public HEPs include five Colleges of Technology and one Higher College of Technology (operated by the Ministry of Manpower); five Colleges of Education (operated by the Ministry of Higher Education); 18 health institutes (operated by the Ministry of Health); Sharia Sciences Institute (operated by Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs); Police College and Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences (operated by the Royal Oman Police) and Armed Forces Medical services School (operated by the Ministry of Defence).

The development of a consolidated quality assurance system began in 2001, when the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) was established by Royal Decree. Its responsibilities include, inter alia, setting standards and accrediting HEPs and their programs. The Board of the OAC is independent, although at present the staff are employed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). Other directorates within the MoHE have responsibility for licensing new HEPs and programs and supervising the activities of private HEPs.

Consistent with the experience of other countries in the early stages of developing higher education systems, the few first years were concerned with establishing the organisational structures and sourcing and developing staff with the necessary skills and experience to guide the development and implementation of systems that are tailored for the national context whilst being commensurate with international standards. These concerns have been addressed in the context of a national “Omanisation” strategy designed to ensure that Omanis are well represented in the workforce, particularly in senior levels. The additional time that implementation of this strategy incurs is repaid by ensuring that national interests will aptly inform the higher education QA system.

In addition to building the organisational and staffing structures necessary to establish the national QA system, early achievements included the formalisation of a qualifications framework; a classification system for HEPs; and first generation standards and processes for HEP and program accreditation. These were compiled in a single document known as the Requirements of Oman's System of Quality Assurance (ROSQA). Using the processes set out in ROSQA, two pilot accreditation processes were conducted between 2004 and 2006.

**Development of a new National Quality Management System**

In 2006, Oman redoubled its efforts to capitalize upon the growth of the sector and the early achievements by developing its first Plan for an Omani Higher Education Quality Assurance System (the “Quality Plan”). In summary, the Quality Plan aims to reduce Oman’s reliance on imported programs and put more emphasis on the development of home grown programs that are nationally accredited and internationally recognised.

Each country is different in its requirements for a national quality management system. There are many elements that must work together in a unique context to provide an effective and comprehensive system. The precise combination of processes and entities differs depending upon such variables as the maturity (age, size, complexity) of the sector; who exercises governance over the higher education providers; whether or not the higher education providers are offering imported programs quality assured elsewhere, offering home-grown programs or even self-accrediting; whether there are single or multiple accreditation authorities within the national framework; and the political will. With that in mind, the proposed national quality system was developed based on a needs analysis that included consideration of the following:

- Leading international standards and declarations;

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• The Guidelines for Good Practice published in 2005 by (INQAAHE)\(^8\);
• A comprehensive review of ROSQA and other Omani decrees and regulations;
• Discussions with senior officials in the MoHE and OAC;
• Consultations (including visits) with the leadership and staff at HEPs; and
• An analysis of extant systems and considerations of accreditation processes conducted to date.

Iterations of the Quality Plan were subject to extensive consultation, including workshops with the OAC Board, MoHE officials, and the sector itself. At the time of writing this paper, the consultation process had concluded and the final version is in the stage of being completed. The final Quality Plan will include twelve goals\(^9\), each comprised of a number of more specific objectives. These goals and objectives outline the minimum requirements for the development of a comprehensive quality management system designed specifically for the Omani higher education sector at this point in time. The goals are as follows:

1. **Educational Frameworks.** The educational system infrastructure will comprise integrated frameworks for fields of study, qualifications and credit, and supporting policies, which will ensure that Oman’s education system can interface with the education systems of benchmark countries.

2. **Standards for Higher Education Providers.** A comprehensive suite of higher education provider standards will be established for the Oman Higher Education sector, which will guide provider licensing and accreditation, and help maintain equivalence with international standards.

3. **Standards for Student Learning.** A comprehensive suite of standards for student learning will be established for the Oman Higher Education sector, which will help shape the future of the Omani society, guide program licensing and accreditation, and help maintain equivalence with international standards.

4. **Provider Quality Audit.** A national system of independent audits of the effectiveness of the quality assurance systems of higher education providers will be established to encourage the maintenance and advancement of those systems.

5. **Provider Licensing and Accreditation.** A national system of provider licensing and accreditation will be established, which provides confidence to the public of the standing of Omani higher education providers.

6. **Program Licensing and Accreditation.** A national system of higher education program licensing and accreditation will be established, which provides confidence to the public of the standing of higher education programs offered in Oman and facilitates student mobility.

7. **Appeals.** The quality management system will be regarded as fair and credible by being supported with a professional appeals process that meets international standards.

8. **Foundation Program Quality Assurance.** A national system of Foundation Program reviews will be established, which helps ensure that those programs adequately prepare students for their higher education studies.

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\(^9\) Earlier versions of the National Quality Plan had 14 goals. Two were eliminated during the consultative process on the grounds that they set a vision that was overly ambitious for an inaugural plan.
9. **Research Training Quality Assurance.** The quality management system will ensure that higher education plays a leading role in developing national research capacity and capability.

10. **Teaching Quality Assurance.** The quality of higher education teaching in Oman will, in the interests of providing the best possible education to students, rise to a level comparable with benchmark countries.

11. **National Quality Management Information.** National data sets and other information will be collected, analysed and, where appropriate, made public to monitor progress with the *Quality Plan* and to facilitate benchmarking and student choice.

12. **General Capability and Capacity.** Government will assist the higher education sector to develop the capability and capacity to comply with the quality management system, and the will to exceed it.

It can be seen that these goals include a combination of three essential dimensions. Firstly, some infrastructural frameworks and policies are required to enable the sector with common ground for communication. These include, for example, a standard classification of education system (including a revised qualifications framework) and a glossary of terms and acronyms.

Secondly, an integrated set of quality assurance elements and processes is proposed, including standard-setting, licensing, accreditation and quality audits. While these contain a combination of summative assessment and formative evaluation processes, they may all be considered part of the regulatory environment. A simple summary of the regulatory system is as follows. A HEP must obtain a license from the MoHE to operate. Thereafter, it will alternate between institutional quality audits (a formative, “fit for purpose” evaluation) and institutional accreditation (summative assessment against external standards) every four years, conducted by the OAC. These HEPs are not self-accrediting institutions. Their programs must be licensed by the MoHE and thereafter must be submitted to the OAC for accreditation every five years. Licensing and accreditation involve assessment of the programs against nationally set academic standards. If a program belongs to a foreign provider, then rather than being subject to accreditation against Oman’s academic standards, it will be subject to a recognition review, designed to ensure that its iteration in Oman is equivalent to its country of origin iteration (subject to any agreed changes designed to help the program fit the Omani context).

The third essential dimension is a focus on quality enhancement. Specific strategies in this category include the establishment of the Oman Quality Network and the provision of training programs. They are outside, but complementary to, the regulatory processes, and thereby expand the potency of the Quality Plan. The importance of this dimension cannot be overstated, because it helps develop the capability of the sector to implement the other dimensions.

Underpinning all the goals is a set of Guiding Principles which are designed to help Oman strengthen certain ideals and concepts, or embrace new ones, which will increase the potential

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10 The potential for two accreditation jurisdictions to have conflicting standards and requirements is discussed in Carroll, M.I. (2006) Accreditation of Transnational Higher Education Programs: Creating greater choice and sensitivity, in Baird J. (Ed.) *Quality Audit and Assurance for Transnational Higher Education*, Australia: AUQA.
for the Quality Plan to be successful in improving the quality of higher education in Oman. Some of these principles will be referred to in this paper.

A recurring theme during the consultation process was that the Quality Plan is both necessary and ambitious. This presents the first major challenge to its success: cementing its legitimacy. The Sultanate of Oman is a constitutional monarchy, in which the authority of His Majesty’s government is absolute. Nonetheless, obtaining an operationally effective legitimacy for the Plan requires more than a direct application of Government authority. It also requires the active involvement of the sector in its implementation. Consultative processes were used in the development of the Plan. However, the political value of inclusive planning processes do not necessary extend beyond the development phase into the implementation phase.

The balance of this paper deals with a five specific projects\(^{11}\) which are proving effective in cementing the legitimacy of the Plan through the application of strategies of inclusiveness:

- Oman Quality Network;
- National Training Program;
- Standard Classification of Education System;
- Register of External Reviewers; and
- Academic Standards.

**Oman Quality Network**

One of the guiding principles in the Quality Plan is “Co-operation” – the assumption that a level of mutually beneficial interaction by HEPs (and the MoHE and OAC) will aid quality improvement. Yet the MoHE noted that “the level of cooperation [between private HEPs] is very limited”.\(^{12}\) About half of the HEPs in Oman are privately owned and in commercial competition for staff and students. The public HEPs are operated by a number of different Government Ministries. As at the start of 2006 there had been very little national communication between these HEPs, and there were no structures, systems or incentives for facilitating such communication. Yet with the advent of a comprehensive national QA system, these HEPs now find themselves with a good deal in common, such as the need to undertake self reviews and to prepare for external quality audits and accreditations.

The Plan includes an objective to establish an Oman Quality Network (OQN) of representatives from all HEPs. The purpose of the OQN is to provide an informal network by the sector and of the sector in order to facilitate communication and cooperation, especially in terms of quality assurance and quality enhancement issues.

This was accorded the highest implementation priority, so as to help stimulate the sector and create/enhance opportunities for implementing other aspects of the Quality Plan. In fact, establishment of the OQN occurred concurrently with the development of the Quality Plan rather be deferred until after its final approval.

\(^{11}\) Implementation of the Plan involves about 70 separate projects, over a period of ten years. At the time of writing this paper, eleven projects are underway. In the interests of length, this paper only covers five projects. However, the principles discussed are evident in all the projects.

The processes in Oman for establishing an informal network are, in fact, formal. For example, the Minister of Higher Education is the patron of this independent network, and various Government approvals were required. While this may seem paradoxical according to the western idea of social legitimacy (as conceived by Locke), in the Omani context it is effective in integrating the country’s formal system of authority with the sector’s largely self-directed activities, thereby creating a strong liaison.

The OQN is led by a nominated Executive Committee and will organize national training workshops (see below); coordinate sector responses to Government policy initiatives; and undertake benchmarking projects on various quality assurance and quality enhancement topics (for example, it has recently launched a project to benchmark best practice in student evaluation systems, and make the findings available to all members).

Beyond facilitating its establishment, the OAC supports the OQN with a website and some administrative services.

The OQN is one tangible expression of a shift in the culture of the Omani higher education sector. That is a statement requiring some justification, as the term culture is often misused. The OQN is becoming an accepted social structure that embodies the principles of pan-sectoral cooperation and collaboration, where only twelve months earlier there was not a shared understanding, let alone agreement, of the benefits of any such communication.

This shift is explained in part by the described formal+informal system of legitimacy. But it was also brought about by first demonstrating the benefits of cooperation in a separate and safe context: the National Training Program.

**National Training Program**

The development of a comprehensive national quality assurance system inevitably involves the introduction of specific processes (such as quality audit) which will be new to most of the sector. In order to ensure that the introduction of these processes would be successful, a National Training Program was developed comprising a planned series of training modules. Topics thus far have included the following:

- ADRI (a quality assurance model for self reviews and external reviews)
- KPI
- Statistics in Reporting
- Good Documentation – policies, procedures and guidelines
- Preparing a Self Study Portfolio
- Process Mapping
- Benchmarking
- Strategic Planning
- Consulting Stakeholders
- Risk Management
- Getting the Most from Student Evaluations
- Differences of Approaches to Learning and Teaching
- Quality Audit

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Each module comprises a 60-90 minute seminar, supported by dynamic, graphical visual aids, followed by a break and then a 60-90 minute interactive workshop, usually involving small group tasks designed to reinforce the message in the seminar. All modules include a printed handout that summarises the slides and provides a basic bibliography to facilitate further study and training.

These modules are provided free of charge to a limited number of representatives from each HEP (this has been codified to mean OQN members). Attendances have increased steadily over time, but are (usually) capped at 60 in order to ensure that the workshops continue to involve effective small group and plenary discussions. Therefore, in order to maximize the penetration of the program into the sector, a train-the-trainer approach is utilized and all the presentation materials and handouts are made freely available to attendees so that they, in turn, may conduct repeat workshops in their institutions\textsuperscript{14}.

All modules are subject to evaluation by participants. The results for seven workshops have now been processed and informative results are starting to emerge\textsuperscript{15}. Ten quantitative items are positive-oriented and use a 1-5 Likert-type agree/disagree response scale. The item, “I would recommend this workshop to others”, has a mean response of 4.39 (±0.74) where 5 is the optimum result. The lowest response is to the item: “The workshop met my expectations”, with a mean response of 4.04 (±0.95). The tenth is a summary question: “overall, this workshop was excellent”. This item has a mean response of 4.26 (±0.7). The eleventh question asks the respondents to rate their awareness of the topic prior to the workshop and after the workshop. It uses a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 = no understanding and 5 = high level of understanding. The possible differences between pre and post ratings therefore range from -4 to +4. After seven workshops the mean response is +1.10 (±0.7).

While these results are encouraging, the most interesting results come from the open ended questions. The main theme, by far, is that participants appreciate the networking, group sharing and group learning opportunities.

Now that the National Training Program is well established, and given that the initially-identified topics have been attended to, control of the National Training Program will be transferred from the MoHE/OAC to the OQN. The range of topics provided will broaden beyond those identified as important to help implement the Plan, to include any topics deemed by the OQN to be of relevance/interest. Similarly, the range of presenters can widen to include representatives of the sector with good practices to share.

**Standard Classification of Education Framework**

A nationally robust and internationally translatable higher education quality assurance system requires a number of infrastructural policies to be in place. Prominent among these is a standard classification of education (SCED) framework that comprehensively addresses (a) fields of education and (b) levels of education (the infrastructure for a qualifications framework). An effective SCED can enable such activities as statistical collection, analysis

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\textsuperscript{14} The OAC has set up a website for this purpose. See [http://www.oac.gov.om/enhancement/training](http://www.oac.gov.om/enhancement/training), last accessed 26 February 2007.

and exchange, setting the scope of the development of academic standards and even facilitate the negotiation of mutual recognition of courses.

Oman does not currently have a national framework for defining fields of study. It does have a six-level Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF) for defining higher education levels of study. There is potential for the OQF to be refined. It is limited in complexity by not recognizing some types of award qualifications that are commonplace in other jurisdictions (such as postgraduate certificates), and by requiring qualifications to match the framework precisely in quantitative terms, such as years of study or credit hours or credit points (similar limitations are placed on consequential use of the OQF for facilitating credit transfer and qualification recognition considerations). Not only does this mean that due regard for quality measures may be omitted, but it is also problematic when seeking alignment between degree programs imported from different counties (such as a four year bachelor’s degree program from the USA compared with a three year honours program from the UK and a three year bachelor’s program from New Zealand). The OQF is also limited in scope by not including technical education, vocational education or secondary education. This will become increasingly problematic should the international trend of increasing student mobility between vocational and higher education become manifest in Oman.

A project is underway to establish a comprehensive Oman Standard Classification of Education (OSCED) framework. A working group has been established for this purpose by the OAC. The group comprises MoHE and OAC officials, along with senior representatives from the HEPs.

The working group has conducted benchmarking of international/foreign frameworks. It took a broad view, including such frameworks as the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) developed in 1997 by UNESCO; national systems (such as from Australia and Norway); and even different conceptualizations of knowledge classification, such as the Dewey Decimal System.

In the course of considering these options for fit with the Omani sector, it became clear that the classification of education is not necessarily a universal constant. Frameworks can be influenced by the way disciplines are culturally conceptualized; treatments of concepts by different languages; the way they are managed/practiced within HEPs; different approaches to constructing national frameworks and policies (based on perceived need, customary practice and applied competencies); and the national priorities for knowledge development.

Using the combination of international benchmarking and a national working group, therefore, has proven invaluable in ensuring that new systems are appropriately contextualized, while still maintaining a functional resemblance to international benchmarks.

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16 This trend was highlighted during a seminar in Oman by Professor Franklin Gelin, Executive Director, British Colombia Council on Admissions and Transfer, titled “Student Admissions and Transfer: Developing a Comprehensive System of Student Mobility Among Autonomous Post-Secondary Institutions” (Muscat, 20 February 2007).


As with all projects in the Quality Plan, the drafts produced by the working group will be subject to public consultation, thereby adding richness to the talent contributing to the end result, while also engaging the sector in new and stimulating discussion about matters of common interest.

**External Reviewers**

One of the guiding principles in the Quality Plan is “Peer Review”. The OAC uses academic, industry and professional peers to conduct the accreditation assessments and quality audits. Indeed, perhaps the OAC’s most valuable asset is its external reviewers. As with other EQAs in the Arab region, the OAC had been assembling review panels on an *ad hoc* basis. Given that the Quality Plan anticipates about a dozen institutional review panels per year (and a currently undetermined number of program review panels), greater operational planning certainty will be required. But more than that, a greater level of strategic investment is required in this key resource.

A Register of External Reviewers, for example similar to those used by QAA or AUQA, is being established. In time it is intended to include about 200 members; just under half of whom will be from outside the Sultanate. These reviewers are, in effect, charged with the primary responsibility for independently assessing whether national standards are being met and whether HEPs are able to demonstrate continuous quality improvement. As such, they must be credible persons held in high esteem by the sector.

All nominees for the Register have their CVs considered, along with comments from at least two referees. Final decisions about entry into the Register are made by the OAC Board. International nominees are invited through contacting EQAs and regional networks. National nominees are invited from each HEP, with a view to maximizing the opportunities for the HEPs to develop new skills and experiences.

While the selection process ensures that high quality people are chosen, it is also acknowledged that external review processes are complex projects for which reviewers require appropriate training and preparation. No member of the Register is permitted to participate on a Review Panel until they have undergone the OAC two-day training program or had equivalent training or experience in another jurisdiction.

All review panels include persons from inside and outside Oman. Review panels are likely to contain a relatively high proportion (perhaps more than half) of international members until such time as the sector acquires experience with external reviews.

**Academic Standards**

The OAC’s first experiences accrediting programs were based on a self-review of the program by the HEP, followed by the judgment of external academic reviewers. A review of this

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20 “Review Panel” is the generic term used to apply to licensing, probation and accreditation assessment panels, quality audit panels, and ad hoc appeals committees.

21 There are two unresolved factors in making this determination. Firstly, program accreditation will not occur until the relevant academic standards are prepared. Secondly, a decision has not yet been made as to whether a program will be accredited “on call” by HEPs, or as part of a national accreditation exercise to consider all like programs.
The process revealed that there is significant potential for inconsistent results from one accreditation project to the next.  

In response, the Plan calls for academic standards to be formally set. Some of the main benefits of such standards are that they:

- enable good practice to be identified and communicated;
- make accreditation (and licensing) requirements more transparent to assist HEPs with their preparations;
- provide a frame of reference for the external reviewers in conducting their assessment;
- are sufficiently abstract so as to not inhibit the HEP faculties’ legitimate role in curriculum development; and
- assist in the negotiation of credit transfer and recognition of qualifications.

The development of explicit academic standards is a dominant international trend at present. In Oman, the challenge is to do so in a manner that enhances the legitimacy of the national QA system. There are no national academic standards to build upon, and almost no professional bodies with their own standards. So, Oman has embarked upon the establishment of these standards using working groups comprising national and international academic, professional and industry experts. The standards are being set at the Narrow Field level in the new standard classifications system (e.g. “Civil Engineering” as opposed to “Engineering”) and include three dimensions: a set of attributes/characteristics which all degree students are expected to have mastered during the course of their studies; discipline-specific student learning outcome standards that guide overall curriculum development; and program-specific resource requirements. Wherever possible, the working groups source current and appropriate international standards (e.g. from the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology for engineering programs) and tailor these for Oman. Drafts are then subject to public consultation.

The first major case of developing academic standards using working groups pertained to General Foundation Programs (GFPs). Although GFPs are not for credit, and may vary in structure, this was a useful starting point because 85% of all first year students enter into some form of general foundation program. The project involved four working groups: English; Mathematics; Computing; and Study Skills. Each group consisted of senior academic staff from Oman and at least one prominent international academic (professional body and industry representatives were not seen as necessary, given that the purpose of GFPs is to prepare students for their higher studies). They conducted international benchmarking and, incorporating their own knowledge and experience, developed draft sets of standards appropriate for Oman. These drafts were then discussed at a national two-day symposium, and in post-symposium online discussion boards. At the time of preparing this paper, revisions were being made to the standards prior to their final approval by the OAC Board.

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22 The INQAAHE GGP No.3 asks that an accreditation body should make “consistent decisions, even if the judgments are formed by different groups, panels, teams or committees”.

23 To be distinguished from specialised foundation programs and other credit-bearing foundation courses.


and HE The Minister of Higher Education. From that point, the standards will be published, and subsequently used for the external review of GPPs.

The next working groups will focus on degree programs, and therefore will have a broader composition including professional and industry representatives.

The student learning outcome standards are being structured according to a revised formulation of Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives\textsuperscript{26}, which also includes a detailed psychomotor domain\textsuperscript{27}. There have been numerous reports in the literature of this taxonomy being difficult to use in practice, and this was found in Oman as well. However, it has proven extremely effective in ensuring that set standards cover the breadth and depth of types of student learning, rather than unduly focusing on a single type (such as knowledge recall). It has also proven valuable in helping stimulate national debate about the nature of student learning.

Conclusions

This paper outlines the development of a comprehensive national system for assuring the quality of higher education in the Sultanate of Oman. The system is tailored specifically for Oman based on an analysis of its current capabilities and capacity. It may not, therefore, be appropriate for any other country.

A key point is that the development of a quality management system in a developing country requires an equivalent (at least) emphasis on quality enhancement as it does on quality assurance. This balance of emphasis increases the likely effectiveness of the quality assurance processes by raising the capability and the commitment of the sector. It is indicative of the priority accorded to this quality enhancement dimension that, since the commencement of the Quality Plan’s development, the OAC has not conducted any quality audits or accreditations, but rather has put its efforts into implementing quality enhancement projects (commencing even before the Quality Plan has been finalised) such as the National Training Program and establishing the Oman Quality Network.

While the Quality plan is not yet finalized, work has commenced on many of the projects for which there was strong support. Some key findings already evident from this work, and from the Quality Plan consultative processes, are:

1. There are very few quality assurance and quality enhancement objectives which cannot benefit from implementation strategies that include the sector.
2. The involvement of the sector in the development of the quality assurance system and its concomitant standards constitutes an extremely potent form of professional development.
3. The involvement of the sector strengthens the legitimacy of the system.

These findings are reinforced with each new project, and therefore will underpin the implementation of all aspects of the approved Plan for an Omani Higher Education Quality Assurance System.

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\textsuperscript{26} Bloom, B. (Ed.) (1956) \textit{Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals}, Susan Fauer Company, Inc.

\textsuperscript{27} Based on work by Dave, R.H. (1975), in Armstrong, R.J. (Ed.) \textit{Developing and Writing Behavioural Objectives}, Educational Innovators Press.
**Introduction**

Quality assurance (QA) in higher education aims to be a pure public good. But that public good can only be achieved through the mediating framework that is public policy. Relating first principles in QA to outcomes is rarely straightforward. The imperatives of stakeholders, their interest and interventions, often provide the determining inputs which shape the establishment of a particular QA system, and even aspects of its very operation. And when the jurisdictional environment is a federated polity, then the dynamics of QA become yet more complex. All the players agree on the need for institutional accountability and consumer guidance: but, after that, QA becomes a contingent activity – contingent on the externalities of the political and policy and academic environment.

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**PART 1**

**The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA)**

This paper offers reflections on the lessons from the last decade in the establishment, operation and prospects of QA in the Australian higher education sector, and the general questions, issues and challenges that emerge. A major, external Review of AUQA (2006) validated the effectiveness of the Agency in acting for the public good in auditing institutional process and performance; in working to commend and publicise good practice in the sector; and in achieving INQAAHE’s Guidelines of Good Practice. The Review findings provide a retrospective assessment of the work of the Agency.

But what was excluded from its Terms of Reference was, of course, any assessment of the ‘social factors’ as we would call them: the imperatives and negotiations between the Federal and State governments that created AUQA (working through a national consultative committee, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, MCEETYA); the role of the state accrediting agencies that are both subjects of audit and integral parts of AUQA’s state owners; Federal-State relationships, through a decade when Conservative national governments largely dealt with Labor state ministries; the role of the universities as both subjects of audit and as agents who play their own role in lobbying for particular educational outcomes; and the involvement of both public and private providers.
Currently, AUQA is addressing the critical issue of defining its second cycle of operations (to begin late in 2007), and all the major players are involved in the policy debate. This happens partly through the formal Federal framework of MCEETYA, chaired by a state minister, and its working sub-groups. It also happens outside MCEETYA, where the Federal Government and Opposition, the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC), together with business organisations and the media, all position themselves in arguing particular policies and positions.

Such activity is sure to rise with the intensity of a national Election in later 2007. And the Federal Labor Opposition has indeed already released a comprehensive Education Policy, much of which will turn on developing an entirely new QA framework and body for Australia should they win office – with a focus on assuring minimum academic standards by discipline, and also testing outcomes by establishing national consistency in credentials. The Federal Government has also urged AUQA to emphasise the assessment of academic outcome standards in its Cycle 2 audits, and indicated plans for developing a national approach to accreditation and taking certain jurisdictional powers away from the States.

Australian QA constantly lives through interesting times.

The analytic challenge
Making some analytic sense of these processes and developments is of significance if we are to embed our understanding of QA in its local social setting. The Board of AUQA contains members from government, institutions and industry. This diverse group has been keenly aware that it cannot chart mission and practice in a policy-free zone. It is necessary to take account of the dynamics of national and state interests, to reflect the needs of the HE sector, and to take account of major international innovations in QA.

It should also take account of what AUQA has now become as it looks to Cycle 2. While established primarily to conduct quality audits, it has become the Australian expert body on QA in HE, it provides advice and submission, leads initiatives and builds capacity. This has become a major resource, both national and international.

In this whole complex process of consultation and deliberation among many parties, certain generic issues have come to stand out and which probably apply, in varying degrees, across many jurisdictions. It is worthwhile for all of us involved in QA to establish what are those core issues; and also consider how a QA agency can actually deal with them, through its Chair and Board, its Executive Director and its professional staff.

Critical approach and critical theory
The social sciences are rich in theory dealing with policy and administrative politics and politics. It is less well resourced in the matter of theorising the operation of autonomous agencies within national protocols, underpinned by government funding. But there is the emulative model of experiential research in narrative sociology. Such analysis draws from the testimony of participants in events, framed by the public record. It is particularly well suited to an interim ‘balance sheet’
approach of trying to draw out early lessons from the recent QA experience of various different jurisdictions.

AUQA’s history is well recorded in documents and data. These provide the main points of reference in drawing out the central elements which have informed its history.

Moreover, the authors of this paper have together experienced the entire existence of AUQA as participants in its evolution. One author was involved in the Australian QA process from its inception, both as a member of several university executives, and also as a contributor to the ‘negotiations’ which established the organisation which became AUQA when a VC on the AVCC Board. He is now the Chair of the AUQA Board of Directors. The second author, with extensive experience of the Australian HE sector, returned to QA in Australian HE from QA in New Zealand and Hong Kong, to become the founding Executive Director (ED) of AUQA. He remains its ED as AUQA enters Cycle 2 of its trajectory. Together, they offer a unique perspective on the organisation, and they are also able to comment on the general policy and political issues surrounding the working life of a QA agency.

The aim is ultimately to bring a greater external appreciation to the changing nature of QA in Australia and, on this basis, to contribute to the international literature on the QA agencies.

AUQA was created only in 2000 but, by drawing on previous QA work in Australia and overseas, Australia has one of the more established QA systems in HE globally.

This is therefore an illuminating case-study of the challenges in establishing a modern QA agency in a modern democratic state, and a federal state at that.

It also draws out the issues which now confronts AUQA at a crucial juncture in its history:

- the conclusion of its first cycle of audits;
- a major international review;
- the development of a Cycle 2 strategy including attention to a new class of institutions that will be audited by AUQA for the first time;
- a recognition of shifts in the culture of QA globally; and
- the imperative of the Australian educational environment, where there is a special concern for standards and outcomes among different stakeholders.

PART 2
The Issues

The actual form of QA is mediated through the structure, culture, politics and history of the society in which it is located.
The key issues affecting AUQA (and the system more generally) might be categorised under these four broad headings (albeit with some overlap).

1. **History**: the imperatives of the past in shaping the present arrangements, the dynamics of current processes and community expectations of QA policy

2. **Structure**: the crucial consequences of embedding a QA system within a federal polity, which both determines the form of the audit processes and the conditional nature of evolving QA arrangements

3. **Politics**: stakeholder expectations and changing aspirations provide comprise the driving forces for QA arrangements and their constantly “unsettled” character which is often exacerbated by media coverage

4. **Culture**: the parameters of ideology which underpin Australian higher education infect QA arrangements and determine outcomes which lie beyond strategic planning and agreed objectives.

**Conclusion**: while it is now at the end of a successful Cycle One of Australian audits, AUQA has not so much come of age as strenuously worked to deal with the age in which it has come to exist: with no assured outcome in its future existence.

Is this unique; or how has it played out in other national jurisdictions?

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**A. History**

In Australia, this includes the Committee on QA in HE (CQAHE), the use of ISO 9000 and Business Excellence Awards, widespread experience of external professional accreditation of programs / disciplines in institutions, and fairly well established internal QA systems.

**A.1 CQAHE**

At the end of the 1980s, Australia had a binary system with the non-university HE sector subject to more external control than the universities, especially at the program level. The two sectors were merged into a single university sector without adequate planning for the external QA requirements, and in 1992 the CQAHE was created by the Federal government to fill this gap. In 1993-95, it audited every university each year.

The main effects were to
- show that reputation is not enough,
- show that targeted work is effective in raising quality, and hence encourage explicit attention to internal QA systems, tapping into the work needed for professional accreditation,
- validate attention to teaching quality and staff development units,
- establish the phenomenon of external QA in Australian HE, and
- re-establish the international credibility of Australian HE.
The CQAHE’s operations also had significant defects, including too intensive and superficial an implementation, and outputs that ranked institutions. Nonetheless, its cessation in 1996 left a gap (all other major educational exporting countries have at least one quality agency at national level), and in due course this gap led to the creation of AUQA in 2000.

In the planning that led to AUQA, Australia looked at QA agencies doing whole-of-institution reviews in English-speaking countries. It saw the US accreditation system as unsuited to the Australian process of stringent criteria for the creation of universities, and it saw the teaching assessment of the UK’s QA system excessive. The quality audit approach of the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (AAU) was seen to offer the lightest touch combined with effectiveness, and hence was seen to be preferable.

Ultimately, AUQA drew heavily on the procedures of the AAU. The lessons from the CQAHE however were more in ‘how to avoid its defects’, and AUQA found that an early emphasis had to be on how it would differ from CQAHE. (ref DW paper of 2001/2)

A.2 Other sources of inspiration

Education has certain characteristics which should be respected, but a current ideology is that it is really no different from any other commercial endeavour. To help redress this, it is important for education to accept ideas and processes from outside education when it is possible to do so without adversely affecting the educational activity. AUQA has done this as much as possible, while fully acknowledging the special characteristics and needs of HE institutions.

In setting up its model, AUQA drew on the internationally agreed concept of quality audit. This provided a direct interpretation of the first two of AUQA’s Constitutional Objectives, and did it by tapping into a process that is defined and used outside academia. It then extended this through use of the ‘business excellence’ models of quality and the ADRI (approach, deployment, results, improvement) cycle.

It also adopted the concept of ‘extended peer review’ from the AAU. Peer review is an essential part of any external QA process, but if the reviewers are solely from within the sector of the reviewed institution, there can be public suspicion that it is self-serving. Therefore AUQA includes in its audit teams members from industry and from other countries. (The use of foreign review panel members is now becoming increasingly common where language permits.)

AUQA has avoided public service models of QA in the ‘new public management’ mode of emphasis on contestability and deliverables; the ISO9000 documentary approach; and the compliance approach often to be found in vocational education. (Australia is currently discussing how the vocational auditing process can be freed up from input compliance.)
AUQA has not made explicit use of Total Quality Management (TQM), though some of the TQM ideas are implicit in what quality audit looks for. Although HE institutions are ‘service providers’, AUQA has not applied the evaluation instrument SERVQUAL, but has acknowledged its value within some parts of the institutions. More generally, AUQA has acknowledged and avoided duplicating other QA arrangements and systems within the institutions, such as ISO 9000 and professional accreditation.

B. Structure
The most important factor here is that Australia is a federation. Almost all activities are affected by this, and many fall foul of state/federal antagonism. AUQA is a creation of state/federal co-operation, but is occasionally the site of state/federal battles. Other structural features are that the HE sector largely falls into two groups, namely public universities (mostly large, not subject to external program accreditation) and private non-universities (mostly small, subject to external program accreditation). Australia is also a major exporter of education (not only HE). This influences a good deal of the thinking and actions.

B.1 Stakeholder ambitions and strategies
Late in the 1990s, the AVCC and the Federal government both recognised the need for a national QA body. The Federal government arranged to study other systems (as mentioned above) and the AVCC developed initial plans for an agency. Although the two parties were in discussion about this, the Federal minister jumped the gun and in December 1999 unilaterally announced the creation of AUQA. The universities were initially indignant and might have refused to co-operate. But a pragmatic view prevailed that a QA system had to be put in place, after an unfortunate hiatus, and if Australia was to protect its international education market.

What agencies do at any time is determined by negotiation (implicit or explicit) among (some of) the relevant stakeholders. At one extreme, there is in fact no negotiation and the EQA’s activities are dictated by the government. The New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit is at the other end of the spectrum: for example its decision to concentrate on themes in audit cycle 2 was a matter for negotiation only between the AAU and the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, and the choice of themes was between the AAU and the individual universities. The government and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority were indifferent so long as the AAU was working.

In the Australian case, the Federal government put its desire for an agency to MCEETYA which agreed in March 2000 to create AUQA as a company under MCEETYA. This has the beneficial effect of making AUQA a national but not Federal body. It also means that AUQA is not a government department, statutory body or agency, but has the privileges (and responsibilities) of a company. The Board of AUQA has 12 directors appointed by MCEETYA from nominees put forward by various stakeholder groups (Federal government, state governments and territory administrations)
AUQA’s funding comes from the Federal government, a matching amount from all the states combined, and a further matching amount from fees charged by AUQA for each audit. This gives a good range of income sources and reduces the influence of each one.

B.2 Objectives and owners

There are special challenges in dealing with several ‘owners’ of the Agency, and balancing Federal and State expectations. AUQA indeed has nine owners or ‘shareholders’, namely nine government ministers. On the whole, it is easier to be owned by several governments than by one, though one can also be a forum for inter-governmental friction and argument.

Also, the states do not accord AUQA very high priority. This is mainly because a state minister of education is likely to be most interested in schools, then in technical education, and HE comes a poor third, with QA in HE only a portion of that. This translates into a low level of interest in AUQA. Therefore at times when we should be interacting with someone at minister or permanent secretary level, who has power to make decisions or influence colleagues in other jurisdictions, we find ourselves dealing with low-level functionaries. The Chair and ED of AUQA meet individual ministers and MCEETYA as a whole as often as they can be persuaded to agree to meet.

The Federal government is more likely to interact with AUQA at ministerial and senior levels and to take the relationship seriously. This is most likely because more government money to universities comes from the federal government than from the states.

The Federal and state expectations of AUQA are not dissimilar in respect of the universities, namely ‘hold them to account’. Almost all universities are set up under state legislation, and so all jurisdictions take a close interest in AUQA’s reports of audits of universities – the states because of their legal interest and the Federal government because of its financial interest. State and Federal ministers and departments often ask universities what they have done about issues raised by AUQA audit reports. Thus, AUQA carries out the audits and other bodies apply the sanctions. It is for this reason that AUQA has very little in the way of independent sanctions that it can apply to its auditees in relation to recommendations in audit reports.

AUQA also audits the state agencies that accredit most of the private HE institutions. The states find it quite difficult to accept that they are owners of AUQA but yet we audit them, and the accreditation agency audits are a source of some friction (although the analogous ‘owner/auditee’ combination exists in the US regional accreditors). Government departments are not normally subject to systematic, routine external reviews.

It is worth noting that if the AVCC had established the QA agency, its structure and university audits would have been very similar to what has been implemented by
AUQA. AUQA would not, however, be auditing the accrediting agencies, as the AVCC does not have any authority over the states and their agencies.

**B.3 Governance of AUQA**

As mentioned, the 12 directors on the AUQA Board are drawn from various stakeholder groups. They have worked together well to address the interests of the different stakeholders, but rarely allow partisan interests to show through. Tensions occur from time to time as members assert their situated views: for example industry members taking VCs to task for the quality of their graduates or VCs criticising government members for under-funding and over-regulation. However, these interchanges only serve to remind AUQA of the context within which it audits and the different expectations placed upon it. The external review of AUQA found that the Board has addressed the reason for AUQA’s founding, namely enhancing the quality of HE in Australia.

With 12 members, the Board is rather large for the current ideology on these matters, but not large when practical considerations take precedence. A further current ideology is that boards should contain only members external to the activity being governed (for fear of conflicts of interest) but the AUQA Board would lack credibility if there were no vice-chancellors or alternatively no-one from the governments. The interaction is extremely fruitful.

**B.4 AUQA and the auditees**

**Universities**

As described, the AVCC had recognised the need for a QA agency, but when it was set up by the governments the universities felt a sense of trepidation. Would this simply be another layer of bureaucratic regulation? Would it emphasise form over substance? Would it require duplicate records? Would it result in rankings of institutions?

Over the first 18 months after his appointment, the ED visited all universities to talk to whichever staff the university chose, with whatever QA emphasis the university chose. This was an exercise in ‘winning hearts and minds’. The main messages were that AUQA understands that HE institutions have primacy over external quality agencies, that academic matters have primacy over superficial compliance, that the AUQA approach would be sympathetic but firm, academic but independent.

**Agencies**

The agencies were also concerned about the coming audits, but for rather different reasons. As mentioned above, this sort of external review is a novelty for most government departments but scapegoating is not. Agency QA staff, to a greater extent than university staff, could see their jobs being at risk as a consequence of a negative audit report. Also, they pointed out that, no matter what AUQA may say, they are constrained by legislation. A further point is that an AUQA audit recommendation may require legislative change, and this would not be able to be complied with in AUQA’s normally expected time frame.
AUQA could not change any of these constraints, but again a series of visits by the ED to agencies over the first 18 months brought a good deal of reassurance and comfort.

Other institutions
Australia has a category of institutions, called ‘non self-accrediting institutions’ (NSAI), of which there are about 150 nation-wide and which are almost all private. The term means that they cannot ‘accredit their own courses’ but must seek accreditation from their state accrediting agency. Part of the purpose of AUQA’s agency audits is to ensure rigour and national consistency in the agencies’ operations. In this context, AUQA has talked to NSAI, and is acting in their best interests.

Unlike the universities, NSAI do not have an independent need for AUQA, as they are subject to the accrediting agency requirements. From this year (2006), however, AUQA has a different relationship to some NSAI. The federal government has made funds available to some NSAI subject to their being audited. Systems are being set up to provide for some of the accrediting agencies to take on an audit role as well, but many NSAI will come to AUQA for audit. At present, they tend to see AUQA as solely a Federally-imposed compliance requirement. However, AUQA is working with them to show that the concepts of quality are relevant to and useful for them, that the audit process can be scaled to small institutions, and that practice in QA can lead to SAI status.

C. Politics
Aspects that can be included in this category include government regulation and the wide range of stakeholders in HE.

C.1 Federalism
Australian HE suffers from a good deal of government (over-)regulation. This is partly a function of there being two layers of government, so the state governments demand their pound of flesh as a consequence of the legislative base, while the Federal government demands its pound as a consequence of the funds it provides (and it demands more flesh as it provides less funds). What might otherwise be seen as inappropriate treatment of universities, and cause national protests in other countries, is not an election issue because of the general national anti-intellectual ethos: there are no votes to be lost is mistreatment of universities.

The extent to which the form and operations of AUQA have been influenced by the federated nature of the Australian polity has been largely covered in sections B.1, B.2 and B.3. Within the actual audits themselves, the Federation is almost irrelevant. AUQA’s interaction is with the institution and its activities. The audit takes account of the institution’s interactions and constraints, but these may just as well be an AVCC code of practice as a state government law. This is partly because academic autonomy and independence for universities is still regarded as a vital principle in Australia, even though the government requirements threaten it in practice.
When the CQAHE ceased in 1996, the Federal government attempted to maintain the QA momentum in institutions by requiring an annual ‘Quality Assurance and Improvement Plan’ from each institution. Initially, AUQA referred to these in its audits, but they were quickly phased out as duplicative of universities’ audit submissions to AUQA.

In 2002, the Federal government undertook to collect less data from and impose fewer bureaucratic requirements on institutions, though the subsequent reality has been in the opposite direction. One result of that 2002/3 review of the system was the introduction by the Federal government of the ‘Institutional Assessment Framework’ (IAF) under which institutions provide an extensive report to the Federal government every two years. The government analyses this in detail, and it is proving to be a very useful source of information about the institution for AUQA at the time of audit.

AUQA also has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Federal department of education to provide system-wide statistics, so that AUQA has up-to-date comparators for any particular institution that it is auditing. However, AUQA currently makes inadequate use of system-wide statistics.

Does the Federal government see AUQA as a buffer against the deleterious consequences of reduced funding? That is, it can safely reduce funding so long as there is an independent body to affirm where the quality is still good and pull the plug where it becomes bad? This is not necessarily a good approach, but at least it sends positive signals about the quality of Australian HE.

C.2 The 4th Estate
Another aspect that can be put in the category of politics with a small ‘p’ is the range of stakeholders that all expect the universities to serve their interests and/or dance to their tune. We have spoken extensively above about government expectations, and made some reference to the expectations of business and industry. Another very relevant player is the media. To what extent have perceptions of AUQA been set by the media and what has AUQA done to inform media commentary?

AUQA’s Constitution requires the audit reports to be public, and AUQA places them on its website. AUQA recognised that this immediately creates a dilemma. How explicit can AUQA be with its criticisms when these can be taken out of context, featured individually and sensationalised in the media? To offset this problem, AUQA has worked with the media constantly from day one, to encourage them to behave responsibly. Even a valid and serious criticism takes on a different perspective if it is included in an article with some of the positive audit finding, than if it is the only item reported, accompanied by a sensational headline.

AUQA has also tried to show itself responsive to and understanding of the media’s parameters, has provided commentary whenever possible (rarely saying ‘no comment’), has contributed articles, and has responded to articles.
In AUQA’s first year of operation, one university audit became a cause celebre because of a fairly vicious media article, and the VC’s subsequent response, holding AUQA responsible for ‘having got it wrong’. Some other universities have been the subject of media articles that are more negative than their audit report warrants. Otherwise, the media has had little effect over AUQA’s first few years of operations.

In 2005, AUQA commissioned a telephone stakeholder survey to try to get to some bodies that do not commonly interact with AUQA. As it transpired, most of the respondents were from the media, and the response was very positive about the value of and approachability of AUQA.

C.3 Cycle 2 and the future

One specific instance of stakeholder involvement and influence is the discussions around the form of audits in the second cycle. AUQA began the consultation in the middle of 2005 and, with many steps along the way, MCEETYA approved the form of Cycle 2 in November 2006. There was no clear consensus among stakeholders, and as always AUQA attempted to steer a diplomatic middle course.

Responses can be categorised roughly as follows. The AVCC stated that AUQA is still necessary, but its audits should be minimal. Responses from individual universities varied but split fairly equally between ‘no change’, ‘raise the threshold and be more stringent’, and ‘delve more deeply into a smaller number of areas rather than looking at everything’. The governments showed a desire for the measurement of academic performance standards (which is not inconsistent with raising the threshold).

The approach adopted is to take more account of standards but to focus on only two thematic areas. At present, a sector Reference Group is helping AUQA to put substance behind these plans.

An interesting marginal issue relates to terminology. AUQA has adopted the definition of quality as ‘fitness for purpose’. In Cycle 2, AUQA will expect institutions to specify target standards as part of their purpose, and will therefore embrace the checking of standards within a FFP approach. Some of the strongest advocates of the attention to standards do not understand this, and think we must drop the idea of a FFP audit if we are to do justice to standards. That is, there is a tendency not to agree on a definition of the word ‘quality’ and stick with that, but to use it to mean ‘what we think is important at the moment’.

D. Culture

Cultural factors in Australian HE include anti-intellectualism (which has been referred to earlier), ‘managerialism’ (which is almost always used as an epithet, but which is essential in today’s society to allow the academic freedom and collegiality to exist), and university autonomy (which means that universities can introduce new programs without external approval, though of course they generally seek accreditation in professional fields).
Some related matters are as follows.

**D.1 Global rankings**
AUQA with its emphasis on FFP quality audit is firmly opposed to rankings of whole institutions, and has written strongly about the proliferation of rankings. It is not obvious that AUQA has yet had much success and is almost a lone voice. However, one optimistic sign is that our suggestion (which we did not originate) of flexible, personally designed, targeted rankings has been gaining ground.

It is likely that the evident infatuation with rankings is related to the managerialism, as comparisons at this level are irrelevant to the average academic.

The way external quality arrangements and requirements are perceived at the academic coalface is mediated through the institutional management. There is some evidence to show that external review recommendations are more likely to be implemented if they are in accord with the institutional ethos, self-image and understanding – but is this the management’s understanding or the staff’s understanding?.

**D.2 QA and Benchmarking**
What is more important at the level of the academic is how well s/he is performing against others in the discipline. Universities have always recognised that staff belong to the international college of professionals in their discipline. Benchmarking is one way of according some authority to the views, evaluations and understandings that emerge from that.

AUQA will be stressing benchmarking in the Cycle 2 audits in relation to seeking information from institutions on how well they compare in relation to other institutions (nationally and internationally). In its first cycle, AUQA was asked by MCEETYA to report on the international standing of Australian HE, but the focus of the audits did not lend itself to a particularly thorough report of this nature. Attention to outcome standards and to benchmarks should put AUQA in a better position to produce such a report in Cycle 2.

**D.3 QA and peer review**
Peer review also resonates with academics, and as explained above AUQA has used ‘extended peer review’ to achieve credibility with extramural constituencies also. It is noticeable that there is some challenge to peer review from more metric-based approaches to research and institutional performance, but AUQA’s approach to Cycle 2 will continue the best traditions of using metrics interpreted by professional judgement.

To achieve its success in this area, AUQA provides thorough training for its auditors who are highly regarded; it has excellent staff; there is a staff member on each panel; and the panel member writes the reports. On peer review, as on many things, there are fluctuating views over time, but this sort of total package embeds a respected system that can withstand criticism.
Conclusion

QA agencies are not immutable, nor should they be. At the very least, they need to follow their advice to institutions and implement constant quality improvements. At the next level of commitment, they should consider revising their approach from time to time (as AUQA is doing from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2) to keep the ideas fresh and to match the developments in the institutions themselves. They need to be alert to what QA agency characteristics will make external QA processes
- a fad like other quality schemes, or
- passé but having done a good job, or
- enduringly relevant and effective.

To the matters and issues outlined above, there are responses from the experience of AUQA in its practices, and in its corporate existence, within the changing dynamic of public policy developed by a federated state.

**AUQA has not so much “come of age” as worked to deal with the age in which it exists.**

Sometimes, it is may be necessary for an agency to be replaced or renewed. If in the not-too-distant future AUQA were abolished or absorbed into a larger national agency of accreditation and standards, its major legacy for Australian educational outcomes would include:
- Sharper focus on transnational (TN) operations – closure of poor quality TN operations – improved TN contracts and implementation
- Strengthened academic boards, council and board reviews
- Strengthened support for research higher degree students
- Consistency between state accrediting agencies
- Improved websites
- Sharing of good practice
- Positive international reputation of Australian HE QA

The fundamental lessons from AUQA’s experience reinforce the social science principle that all major and successful organisations are constantly reinventing themselves. If there is constant improvement at the heart of QA, then there is constant change for AUQA itself. The extent to which the political environment determines QA, or whether a professional QA agency can influence that context, is the enduring question for Australia.

How does all this play out in other jurisdictions?
Abstract

The higher education and training (HET) sector focus on lifelong learning, world of work and the future. With regard to this, the current focus of HET sector is on quality assurance procedures that emphasise accountability, compliance and standards, which could be acquired through quality assurance of student's assessment.

This paper demystifies the quality assurance of students learning in technical and vocational education and training spectra. Quality assurance of student's assessment is the most important activity and technical vocational education (TVE) is also the specialisation that needs to be natured for economic development of any global community. But in contrary quality assurance of students' assessment is the most overlooked activity and technical vocational education specialisation within the holistic HET paradigm - the academic culture that has endangered and alienated students and staff to the detriment of the system as a whole.

If quality assurance system as pertained to HET assessment of students learning parameter of TVET are to be recognized, the increasing diverse nature of higher technical and vocational education institutions, in the millennium, accountability, high standards and compliance will need to be balanced by a greater emphasis on encouraging and promoting innovation, self-improvement and credentials of higher calibre of individual student's ability and competence in combating local and regional poverty.

It is of salient phenomena for both quality assurance agencies and institutions themselves to operationalise viable mechanism and adapt their policies, procedures and culture if higher education (Technical and vocational) education and training (HE TVET) system is to respond positively to students quality assurance assessment and be provided with essential required skills in lifelong learning, work and the future framework for the new millennium.

This paper argues that whilst quality assurance of student learning assessment is understandable within the theoretical and practical academic framework in HE TVET, there have erupted heuristic issues that deserve immediate and particular attention in the new millennium.
Introduction

New century and new millennium inevitably encourage consideration of reflections and predictions. It is time to consider what has been achieved in the last century, to build upon, to decide what should be our mission and vision and how to achieve our goals and objectives to conceptualise responsive HE TVET. The distinctive feature of students' assessment in HE TVET sector is its attempts to encourage scientific, technological literacy and lifelong learning, work and the future and also its emphasis in meeting societal needs and importance of developing ethos of social responsibility.

Many assessment practices remain valid, as they have ever been. However, new challenges have arisen in HE TVET sector of which traditional approaches fail to address. There is also an increasing amount of research being carried out in the premises. The purpose of this article is not to repeat what is readily available, not overturn much of what has been written. It is to bring new ideas on quality assurance of students' assessment in HE TVET, highlight procedures and viable remedial mechanisms and recommendations portrayed which encompass the following:

- Knowledge base for quality assurance of students' assessment in HE TVET sector; bring new ideas on quality assurance of students' assessment in HE TVET to the attention of practitioners, administrators and those with responsibilities for setting policy;
- The need to focus on competence as a gist towards socio-economic development and enhance its capacity building;
- International mobility of individuals for the world of work as integrated and underpinned within principles and procedural parameters of quality assurance.

Not all the developments described in the following paragraphs in this article have yet made their appearance widely in quality assurance of students' assessment in HE TVET sector. Others are not entirely novel but reflect a dimension of impact. Some are limited to other locations and universities. Notably, reports suggest that technological advances and move towards international mobility and globalisation of many human endeavours are fast spreading. What is a puzzle today is often tomorrow's innovation and creativity and the following year's orthodox. We believe in useful inclusion within the topology parameters as comprehensive coverage as possible of known existing innovatory activities in quality assurance of students' assessment in HE TVET sector.

While quality assurance of students' assessment in this article applies to all forms and aspects of HE TVET in nature, provided either in educational institution or under their respective authority, by public, the private sector or through other distinctive organised education, formal or non-formal, whose objective is that society members involved should have access to the pathways of lifelong learning, work and the future, quality assurance cannot be over emphasised.

Some of the issues outlines will be of adequate relevance in some other subject areas than others, and in other countries, there may be a need to draw demarcation as there may be differences in definition and structure. However, given the collective impact of globalisation, quality assured issues that are outrageous.
Rationale

In the history of TVET, a system approach to curriculum development is relatively recent. Due to lack of resources, experience and traditions, there have been certain tendencies in some developing countries simply to copy existing curriculum materials from industrialised nations without proper adaptation to the local situation and needs, which has often proved to be inappropriate and expensive (UNESCO CD ROM, 2001). With regard to UNESCO's depiction, during the past decade, there has been awareness of the need to bring greater innovation and creativity to the process of curriculum development in TVET in order to be responsive and to cope with the changing requirements for employment created by rapid socio-economic and technological requirements and development.

There is today the accumulation of discoveries, applications and know-how that constituted an unprecedented source of knowledge, information and power. Never have there been discoveries and innovations that promised a greater increase in material progress than today, but neither has the productive - or destructive - capacity of human kind left unresolved so many uncertainties. The major challenge of the coming century lies in the ground between the power which humankind has at its disposal and the wisdom that it is capable of showing in using it (World Conference on Science, 1999: 19 as cited in (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation and Commonwealth Association of Science, Technology and Mathematics Education (UNESCO and CASTME), 2001:2)

Background

European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - Helsinki, (2001) acknowledges the new ways of delivering higher education with opportunities to enhance the quality and quantity of learning, assisted by advances in information and communication technology whereby quality assurance in students' assessment in higher education has been the central focus.

Certification Council for Technikon Education - South Africa (2000) in a guide for evaluation committees has argued that the uniqueness of career oriented education and training is emphasised by the specific characteristics with which qualifications have to comply.

University of Glamorgan - Walles (2002) ascribed that the quality assurance agencies' mission is to promote public confidence that quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded. Facilitate the development of benchmark information to guide standards.
MacDonald, Boud, Francis and Gonczi (1995) for UNESCO, in 'UNEVOC Studies in Technical and Vocational Education 4' portrayed that assessment is perhaps the most vital of all the processes in vocational education. With a high quality assessment system in place, students can be confident of their training and employers can have confidence in qualified students. Without them, however, either of these can be placed in jeopardy.

Quality Assurance of Students' Assessment in HE TVET Sector

According to Hodson and Thomas (2004:4) the last few years of the second millennium have been characterised by tension with higher education systems that have transcended nationality and functional speciality. Hodson and Thomas further argued that whether we focus on the process of democratisation in central eastern Europe, the ending of apartheid regime in south Africa or the comparatively mundane moves towards a mass system of higher education in United Kingdom, education systems are faced with pressures associated with financial constraints, demands for public and societal accountability and a defence with institutional autonomy.

From Hodson and Thomas' argument, it is deducible that quality assurance of students' assessment is encompassed within the demands for accountability, within international turbulence, the growth and advancement of quality assurance mechanisms. A range of issues is beginning to emerge that question the effectiveness of current issues, trends, policy and practice in quality assurance of students' assessment in HE TVET sector. It is evident that the nature and calibre of HE TVET in the later years will be different from how they are now.

In various respects the key concern will be on diversity whether that diversity is in terms of institutional mission and vision, programmes aims and objectives in modes of instructional delivery, students clientele performance, structure of systems or staff motivation, development and expectations.

Fundamental to education is the need to evaluate students' learning outcomes as reflections to effective teaching methods and programme offered, as in HE TVET, it is of prime importance to evaluate whether students have acquired valid academic competence skills. Assessment also allows fine tune teaching methods and expands motivation and creativity of educators and assessors. Finally, assessment allows department of division heads to evaluate the effectiveness of entire programmes.

Current Issues and Trends

To assess a department and or programme, a rubric is created that assesses the goals of the programme. Assessing the course and assessing the whole programme allows both individual faculty members and departments division chairs to refine and design course materials that allow for maximum learning for all students, both traditional and adult learners.
There is a need to find alternative methods of instructional delivery for TVET. Institutions and teachers should be oriented to use flexible teaching and learning materials. Some of these should include: the development of modularised curricula and assessment methods; the development and use of appropriate technologies for instruction - online services and training materials, computerised learning packages, use of CD-ROMS, intranet and internet, etc (UNESCO, 1999:38)

Ongoing classroom assessment provides a continuous monitoring of students learning. The faculty receive ongoing feedback about their effectiveness; students receive a measurement of progress.

Although assessment strategies used to depend on the course, most course lend themselves to a different and variety of methods. Such variety of methods lend themselves to a code of practice for assessment which intern evoke and form quality assurance of academic quality standards which could be enforced in quality assurance of students assessment in HE TVET sector subscribing to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.

**Quality Assurance Code**

Schmidt - UNESCO evoked a notion that it is the most important task of quality assurance of students' assessment in HE TVET to enable clientele to cope successfully with uncertainty and anxiety through:

- information and knowledge about reasons for changes, including systems' knowledge such as computer systems, banking systems, free - market systems etc;
- skills on how to gather and select information and knowledge, and how to use them in planning and decision making processes;
- problem solving and practical skills, social and team skills;
- entrepreneurial skills and
- the development of the learner's personality through general, vocational and professional education.

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education transcribed that code of quality assurance identifies a comprehensive series of system - wide expectations covering matters relating to the management of academic quality and standards in higher education. In so doing it will provide an authoritative reference point for institutions as the consciously, actively and systematically assure the academic quality and standards of their programmes, awards and qualifications. The code assumes that, taking into account nationally agreed principles and practices. Each institution has its own system for independent verification both of its quality and standards and of effectiveness of its quality assurance system.

**Assessment of students - General Principles**

As bodies responsible for academic standards, HE TVET institution should have effective procedure for:

- designing, approving, supervising and reviewing the assessment strategies for programmes and awards;
- the consistent implementation of rigorous assessment practice which ensure that the academic/professional standards for each award element is set and maintained at the appropriate level and that individual student's performance is properly judged against this (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education),
In considering how their own policies and practices reflect this precept, and inline with Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education perception, institutions need to consider, in addition to their own policies, the implications of the introduction in quality assurance of students' assessment in HE TVET benchmarking statements and the national qualification frameworks.

Certainly, institutions will wish to ensure that:

• assessment tasks and associated criteria are effective in measuring student attainment of the intended learning outcomes with practical orientation and more emphasis on skill development through experiential training;

• assessment policies and practices are responsive and provide for the effective monitoring of the validity, equity and reliability of assessment in technical and vocational education.

The principles, procedures and processes of all assessment should display transparency, explicit, valid and reliable principles of the generic quality mechanisms. Forms and or medium of report vary widely in principle elements of generic quality assurance mechanism. However, in designing and operationalising their assessment process, institutions will wish to consider:

• How to make information and guidance on assessment clear, accurate, consistent and accessible to all staff, students, placement, practice assessors and external examiners.

• The range and types of assessments used and how these measures appropriately the achievement by students of those skills, areas of knowledge and attributes identified as intended learning outcomes for the module or unit programmes, and allow the strengths and weakness of the students to be demonstrated;

• How to ensure that assessment is operated fairly within the programmes, and that the principles for quality assurance of students' assessment in HE TVET are applied consistently across the institution;

• How the reliability of quality assurance assessment in HE TVET is demonstrated, for example, the consistent use of agreed marking and grading schemes, and moderation arrangements;

• The extent of any discretion that may be exercised in relation to students whose assessment performance might have been affected by extenuating circumstances;

• The keeping of appropriate records of the procedures and decisions of each quality assurance panel and board of examiners as in the agency code of practice on external examining.

The informative Conduct of Assessment
Higher education should ensure that quality assurance of student's assessment in higher technical and vocational education is conducted with rigour and fairness and with due regard for security.

In addressing this precept institutions need to consider:

• The publication of clear rules and regulations governing the conduct of quality assurance of students' assessment in higher technical and vocational educational and training sector including deadlines for submission of assessed work;
• Measured to prevent fraudulent activities including impersonation and the submission of work that is not that of the student in work submitted for assessment in technical and vocational education and training;
• Proper and rigorous invigilation of assessments, including rules and guidelines and invigilators and be made aware of equipment such as cellular phones, computers and programmable scientific calculators that can store information;
• Any special measures that may be necessary for quality assurance of students' assessment of materials based on work placements or periods of study abroad;
• Procedures for retention by the institution of assessed work for a specified period of time.

Scheduling Summative and Amount of Assessment Marking and Grading

HE TVET sector should publish and implement consistently clear criteria for the marking and grading assessment, HE WET institutions should ensure that there are robust mechanisms for marking and for the moderation of marked scripts.

Precepts and guidance relating to external scrutiny and moderation of marking are to be found in the quality assurance agency code of practice: external examining of such robust activities that quality assurance of students should pander. In so far as mechanism for marking and internal moderation are concerned, in developing its policies and procedures institutions will wish to consider, for an example:
• The range of guidelines for marking memoranda and grading that are used throughout and within the institution;
• The benefits and limitations of marking system that mask the identity of the individual candidate from markers and/or examiners;
• The use, where appropriate, second marking' including the reliability and validity of methods used for sampling of assessment from larger groups such as in cross checking for validity and reliability;
• Undertaking an analysis of marking and marking trends to facilitate comparisons and provide evidence on standards of which must be criteria referenced instead of being norm-referenced;
• The rules and regulations encompassing governance of any internal and external moderation of marks.

HE TVET sector should publish for the aggregation of marks and grades and the rules and regulations for progress, final awards, classification and articulation. Ensure that where they practice compensation and/or condonation (condonement) the regulation are clear and consistent and their application does not jeopardise the integrity of awards and standards. However, quality assurance of students' assessment in HE TVET should not be regarded as an implicit entity. Institutions should give consideration to:

• The basis on which component marks, or other assessment outcomes are to be aggregated for the purpose of progression, award, classification and articulation;
• The need to ensure that outcomes of aggression procedures are statistically correlated;
• Whether compensation for, and condonation of failure should be allowed particularly within credit based systems;
• The number and timing of retakes that are permissible;
• Rules on deferring assessment, together with any special assessment conditions or penalties that may apply, including any restriction of the marks, grades or levels of obtainable awards on the basis of retaken or deferred assessment;
• Policies on re-submission of assessed work and resetting of examinations;
• How award and classification borderlines are defined and dealt with;

The basic elements and principles of assessment are that I should be valid, reliable, flexible and fair. Hagar et al (1994) as cited in (McDonald, Boud, Francis and Gonczi, 1995:20) indicates that:

In competence based assessment system, assessors make judgements, based on evidence gathered from various sources, about whether an individual meets a standard or criteria set. The notion of competency standards is essentially a development of criterion reference assessment, with the addition of focus on the importance of assessment of performance, and its application particularly to HE TVET. Competence cannot be observed directly, but it can be inferred from performance.

**Feedback to students**

Due to practicality and nature of HE TVET, the sector should ensure that appropriate feedback is provided to students on assessed work, in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvement. In meeting the needs of students on their progress and attainment, HE TVET institutions will need to consider:

• The timeliness of feedback on all the practical procedures that students have been engaged in, with the attempt to acquire necessary practical orientated skills and competence;
• The effective use of comments on returned work, including relating feedback to assessment criteria, in order to help students identify areas for improvement as well as commending for evident achievement;
• Specifying the nature and extend of feedback that students can expect in relation to particular types and units of assessment, and this is to be accompanied by the return of assessed work with which reflections on individual capacity are portrayed;
• The role of oral feedback, either on a group or individual basis as a means of supplementing written feedback;
• Feedback informs students about their respective performances, strengths and weakness, therefore, students having completed any task, have to be assessed and feedback given;

Feedback plays an important role in the learning students undergo. However, the distinction is not made between giving feedback on a particular piece of work, or demonstration of skills on the other hand.

**Staff Development and Training**

Quality assurance of students’ assessment in higher education technical and vocational education and training sector cannot be under emphasised. Students; performances are indicators for those members of the staff who duly need further education in their skills competence. HE TVET sector should ensure that all staff involved in the assessment of students is equipped with competent skills to undertake their roles and responsibilities.
Institutions should consider how staff development can:

- Enable staff to learn about new approaches to assessment as well as the best ways to operate existing or traditional methods;
- Promote understanding of the theory and practice of assessment and its implementation;
- Meet the training needs of bureaucratic administrative involvement in assessment procedures.

**Language of Quality Assurance of Students' Assessment**

HE WET sector's language of assessment and teaching will normally be the same. However, if for any reason, this cannot be achieved, institutions must ensure that their academic standards are not put at risk and quality cannot be jeopardised. HE WET sector are subject to the requirements of the legislations and acts. Institutions involved with multi-cultural languages other than that not used for teaching and study, should publish:

- Procedures for considering students' requests for assessment to be undertaken in a language used for teaching, including the time at which such request should be made;
- Criteria to be used when considering how to respond to such request. In determining the criteria institutions will need to consider:
  - How to employ personnel with required expertise in the appropriate language (s), subject knowledge and quality assurance assessment methods and procedures;
  - Suitable external examiners fluent in the relevant language(s) of instructional delivery will be identified, appointed and involved with the assessment process;

**Accreditation Body and Professional Requirements**

HE TVET sector should ensure that where a programme forms part of the qualification regime, and framework of a professional or statutory body, clear information is available to staff and students, about specific quality assurance assessment requirements that must be met for progression towards the professional qualification and accreditation. Institutions should ensure that there is clear information at hand about:

- Which options, priorities and modules must be passed to meet the requirements of the body;
- The level at which the programme, or any part of it must be passed to meet requirements of the body.

**Review of Regulations**

Quality assurance of students' assessment in HE TVET sector have effective mechanism for the review and development of assessment regulations. With this notion in anticipation, institutions should consider:

- How proposed changes are discussed with staff, students and external examiners for justification and validity;
- In developing and implementing such mechanism, organisations need to consider the frequency and processes for review of their assessment regulations;
- Procedurals that involve any appropriate staff, students, external examiners and participating stakeholders in the review and discussions of proposed developments and changes;
- The procedurals and time scales for enacting any changes to assessment regulations.
Recording, Documentation and Publication of Quality Assurance Assessment Decisions

HE TVET sector should ensure that assessment decisions are recorded and documented accurately and systematically. Institutions should ensure that the decisions of relevant examination boards are published as quickly as possible, consistent with rigour of quality assurance assessment and accuracy. Nevertheless, institutions will be compiled to consider providing:

- Clear statements of the responsibilities of all those involved in computation, checking and recording of assessment decisions;
- Systems for back-ups when using information technology equipment or transmission of assessment data;
- Clear policies on access to information of assessment judgment about individuals.
Conclusions

The significance of assessment issues in HE TVET is often not appreciated. There is, for example, probably more bad practice and ignorance of important issues in the area of quality assurance of students' assessment in HE TVET. For instance, students can, with difficulty, escape from the effects of poor teaching to succeed; they cannot, even if they want to succeed in a course, escape from the effects of poor assessment. Quality assurance of students' assessment in HE TVET sector acts as mechanism with more control on students, and has more effect on students than most teachers or administrators are prepared to acknowledge.

That is to say, quality assurance of students' assessment in HE TVET is important in its own right, it cannot be separated from the social context, and it also aids or inhibits the attempts of educators to improve teaching and learning. It is with this in mind that the article, focusing on current quality assurance issues is of magnificent importance within the qualitative paradigm of students' assessment in HE TVET sector for HE TVET to be more responsive whatsoever.

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ABSTRACT:
Due to the wide demand on higher education in Jordan, a fast horizontal and vertical growth has been observed in that sector over the last 15 years. The growth is demonstrated by continuously increasing number of public and private universities along with numbers of academic degrees that are offered by each university. However, none of these universities has a pre-set and clearly focused vision and mission statements that define its goals, aims and its reason for existence. Moreover, although degrees offered are subject to needs of education market, most of them are not fully oriented towards the genuine skill requirements of local and regional labor markets, especially in terms of basic knowledge (hard skills) and soft skills frequently requested by employers. Quantitative growth, in many cases, had initiated a deteriorating effect on quality of higher education. In this paper, challenges to quality of higher education in Jordan will be analyzed, especially those of financial deficiency, increasing demand for higher education by local and regional communities, competencies of admitted students to higher education institutions, sufficiency and academic efficiency of recruited faculty. Means of higher education institutions reform will be explored. An independent accreditation and quality assurance commission in-charge of implementing both the current accreditation practices and a proposed total quality management system at the national level will be proposed.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
Application of institution and program accreditation in Jordan started with the licensure of the first private university in 1991. In 1989, The Law of Private Universities was issued. A clause of that law specified one of the Higher Education Council duties as to "ensure the fulfillment of private universities of their objectives and for that end, the Council issues respective instructions for licensure and accreditation of higher education institutions". In the same year of 1989, criteria for institution and certain program accreditations were approved and published by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. In 1998, The Law of Higher Education stipulated the establishment of The Accreditation Council of Higher Education Institutions. No specific descriptions of the role, mandate and obligations of the Council were specified other than the major objective of the Council which was "to upgrade level and efficiency of higher education in the Kingdom". In 1999, the Council issued "Criteria for Institution Accreditation". In the following year of 2000,
the Council published criteria for accreditation of 46 academic programs. In the year 2001, a new higher education law was approved. The Law specified in different articles formation, objectives, role and mandate of the Accreditation Council as summarized in the following section.

MAJOR CHALLENGES TO HIGHER EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT:
Challenges to improvement of higher education in Jordan can be categorized into:

1. **Increasing Demand on Higher Education:**

   Demand on HE has been increasing immensely in the last 15 years. This created a burden on higher education institutions, especially public universities, and, subsequently, called for the Government to allow the establishment of private universities. Moreover, universities were encouraged to undertake all necessary measures facilitating enrollment of students from neighboring Arab countries i.e. Jordan became an education hub in the region. This phenomenon has actually led to two main effects:
   - Diversity of students background and absence of an admission policy that guarantees a certain level of scientific knowledge together with the absence of quality assurance procedures and criteria for higher education, quality has been adversely affected.
   - Currently, as other Arab countries started going towards establishing their own private higher education institutes (Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Gulf States), what has been supposed to be an economic sector may be seriously challenged. We believe that the only way to excel in this field and to preserve such an economic sector is by adopting proper quality assurance system.

2. **Lack of Vocational Education Orientation:**

   Employment market in Jordan suffers from an apparent inflation in university graduates and a shortage in qualified skilled technicians. The problem has several socio-economic and educational aspects of which are the following:

   2.1 Original objective of intermediate community colleges was to provide community and labor market with skilled human resources needed for the middle layer of professions. However, due to predominance of negative social values concerning that kind of education and lack of incentives to steer students properly towards vocational education, community colleges have become just a mean to bridge to corresponding university programs. In addition, community colleges suffer from poor curriculum, weak harmonization with market requirements, inability to attract highly qualified faculty members, low level of independency, weak planning and management, limited financial resources and lack of quality awareness.

   2.2 Decreasing demand on vocational education due to the relaxation in university admission requirement. This measure encouraged students with low grades in High School Certificate to seek university studies rather than community colleges (in 2005, (number of students enrolled in community colleges formed 11.71% of the total number of students joining HEIs). To help alleviate such a negative trend, Higher Education Council ruled in the summer of 2006 that a minimum grade of high school certificate should be not less than 70% for those graduates seeking admission into certain university programs (Nursing, Islamic Studies, Finance and Administration Sciences and Computer Sciences).
3. **Incompatibility Between Higher Education Outputs and Market Needs:**

Lack of compatibility between national needs and requirements for academic programs licensure. In addition, lack of association can be observed between curricula of academic programs and respective skills of educational process outputs.

3.1 Lack of an institutional methodology for harmonization between higher education outputs and local and regional market variable requirements.

3.2 Lack of association between curriculum of certain fields and international accreditation criteria e.g. engineering, ICT, nursing and accountancy.

3.3 Local employers are not satisfied with graduates abilities in terms of skills necessary for success in labor market.

3.4 Current curricula lack courses that help improve soft skills e.g. analytical thinking, communication, leadership and entrepreneurship.

3.5 Universities do not offer satisfactory support services to its students like internship programs, training programs, job market needs for certain skills or professions and non-methodological activities.

3.6 Redundancy in programs and fields of study (stereotype universities) as well as frequency and overlap of majors under different names and similar contents.

3.7 Inability of universities to affect an integrated strategic approach at national level concerning specializations that flexibly meet the changeable labor market requirements.

3.8 Lack of observing needs of local, regional and international employment markets and its potential future dimensions.

4. **Financial Challenges:**

Public universities depend mainly on governmental subsidies which are decreasing by time (In year 2005, it comprised only 20% of the total universities’ income). This has forced several universities to seek additional resources by establishing high tuition fee-programs like parallel, evening and international academic programs. Unfortunately, such programs contribute to the degrading quality of higher education due to:

4.1.1 Relatively lower qualifications of students admitted to such programs as compared to their colleagues admitted to regular programs.

4.1.2 Increasing pressure on limited university infrastructure and faculty human resources.

4.1.3 Extensive engagement of faculty members in teaching activities on the expense of research contribution i.e. switching university message from participation in solving local community problems (by doing appropriate research) into lower class teaching university.
Due to low government support and low tuition fees (forming on the average about 56% of total universities income); the indebtedness of all public universities reached JD125 million in 2005.

4.2 With the exception of number of students enrolled in a given public university, there is no predefined quality criteria for the government financial support to these universities. Subsidies neither depend on university academic performance nor on real cost of educational process itself. This hinders strategic university planning. Moreover, the support is provided to the university, no part of it is directed to distinguished needy students who may deserve such support.

4.3 Low allocated budgets to invest in universities infrastructure which, adversely, affects number of foreign students willing to join these universities.

4.4 Lack of financing targeted to develop the higher education sector, stereotype of universities funding and lack of sustainability dimension.

4.5 Unavailability/poor financing of activities aiming at developing a comprehensive strategic plan for the outputs of the higher education; the matter that makes universities depend on their limited spontaneous self-resources and, subsequently, resulting in poor output.

5. Deteriorating Quality of the Education Process itself:

Although private higher education is subject to certain licensure measures enforced by MOHE before being allowed to offer any subject degree, such measures are merely quantitative rather than qualitative. They aim at ensuring a basic level of quality in terms of curriculum, staff, lab facilities and teaching-learning resources. Some of the challenges and points of concern associated with quality are at the national level and concern the higher education sector and environment as a whole not just individual universities. These challenges can be summarized in:

5.1 Admission Policies:
   5.1.1 Weak relevance between students’ performance in General Secondary School Certificate (Tawjihi) and their choices of study. Overall student performance is the only factor reckoned for admission to a given academic program. This weakens the association between school and university studies.
   5.1.2 Neglect of quality factor in admission policies, especially in private universities and in private (paid) programs in public universities.
   5.1.3 Admission policies are specified to different societal categories. This may lead to lack of fairness and homogeneity in admission criteria.

5.2 Shortage in Qualified Faculty: In 2005, Student to Staff Ratio (SSR) reached (36:1) in public universities and (34:1) in private universities. International comparisons indicate corresponding ratios of (9:1) in Canada and (14:1) in USA. This is mainly due to:
5.2.1 Difficulty in recruiting highly qualified faculty members in certain fields.
5.2.2 Lack of a well-defined policy for capacity building of human resources e.g. training faculty members, mentoring newly recruited members and a fair transparent evaluation system.
5.2.3 High tendency towards losing foreign faculty members in the medium term.
5.2.4 Brain-Drain phenomena, as many Jordanian staff members are attracted to some neighboring countries by higher salaries and better benefits.
5.2.5 Low investment, especially by private universities, in students grants to leading international universities aiming at recruitment of new faculties with the latest research and scientific trends.
5.2.6 Weak tendency toward expenditure in research as manifested by emphasis on teaching, absence of incentives to do research and participation in international scientific conferences. This leads to limit faculty experience and know-how capacity to theoretical sciences away from practical and useful knowledge which help well-equip students to market needs.

5.3 Cooperation and Integration: Apart from minor activities here and there, there is weak coordination between universities in all aspects of educational processes. For example, there is no indication that universities mutually invite staff members from other universities as external examiners and reviewers at the undergraduate level. In addition, absence of cooperation can be manifested in the following features:
5.3.1 Lack of cooperation policies among universities that may encourage national educational networks (e.g. inter-library loans, national computer networks, joint research projects).
5.3.2 Absence of any staff exchange or students exchange policies among HEIs. Such policies certainly promote good practices.
5.3.3 Absence of joint research centers and advanced labs between universities and between universities and the community organizations. Some of the expensive labs that cannot be afforded by a single university can be shared among universities and organizations with same interests. This encourages inter-universities and universities–community communication and cooperation.
5.3.4 Prevailing negative cooperation attitudes among universities, especially between private and public universities.

5.4 Scientific Research: In the year 2005, allocated budget for scientific research in all Jordanian universities was only 0.95% of their total budget. The limited research activities are carried out by faculty members who suffer from:
5.4.1 Heavy teaching loads and lack of research facilities in certain advanced fields.
5.4.2 Poor scientific research environment, skills and cultural attitude, especially in regard to graduate students. These factors contribute significantly to low grade research output.
5.4.3 Weak cooperation between industry and HEIs. This produces fantasy research of no real value to development of national economy.
5.5 University Management: University management suffers from a myriad of problems of which are:
5.5.1 Inconsistency between university management mode and requirements for development of modern higher education institutions.
5.5.2 Lack of strategic planning in most of higher education institutions.
5.5.3 Very low scholarship budget (≈1.75% of university budget).
5.5.4 Practices of “last minute achievement” and “achievement connected to pressure and demand” by Institutions
5.5.5 Increasing competition due to penetration of foreign universities and untraditional educational systems locally and regionally.
5.5.6 Weak promotional and marketing activities of Jordanian HE abroad.
5.5.7 Sophisticated bureaucratic procedures facing foreign students.
5.5.8 Weak orientation and student induction into university and college programs.

5.6 Quality Awareness: No HEI has a clear mission, vision or a set of objectives that are translated into strategic plans, academic plans and curriculum with intended learning outcomes for each degree and topic. Allocated budget for investment in quality assurance is very modest and there is absence of integral quality assurance system in universities and colleges and, subsequently, ranking system for universities and academic programs. Profit-oriented objective of most private higher education institutions has caused further deterioration in educational quality.

THE ACCREDITATION COUNCIL:

Membership of the Accreditation Council comprises the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research (president), Director General of the Accreditation Council (vice president), the Secretary General of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and nine other members from the academia and interested stakeholders. The mission of the Accreditation Council is to ensure a minimum quality assurance of higher education in Jordan. The objectives of the Council were to improve quality and efficiency of higher education institutions through:

1. Establishment of dynamic criteria for the accreditation of higher education institutions (HEI) and their affiliated programs. The criteria must be subject to continuous modification and improvement whenever experience or application indicate a need for that.
2. Accreditation of HEI and academic programs according to the preset criteria.
3. Periodic auditing of HEI and programs. This includes verification of HEI commitment to their original objectives.

The Council was authorized to impose a sequence of penalties in cases of violation to the respective criteria. Penalties start by issuing ultimatum to be followed by financial fines, suspension of students admission and finally by temporary or permanent institution closure.
MAJOR FEATURES OF INSTITUTION ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

The criteria deal with requirements to be furnished by a given institution. Such requirements are intended to maintain minimum quality requirement of the educational process like university administration, faculty and department organization, student to faculty ratio, availability of teaching assistants and lab attendants, basic buildings infrastructures (spaces, class rooms, auditoriums availability, sport facilities, parking lots, drinking water and toilet facilities), laboratories and workshops specification, and library requirements (e.g. space, books, availability of scientific journals of electronic and paper format and furniture).

MAJOR FEATURES OF PROGRAM ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

Criteria of program accreditation is narrowed down to meet specific program requirements like program curriculum, number of faculty members in the given department and their academic ranks and specialties, availability of subject books and journals, and availability of specific laboratories and equipment.

ACCREDITATION: LICENSURE OR QUALITY ASSURANCE?

Jordan's experience in accreditation coincided with the permission for private sector to invest in higher education. Therefore, the philosophy behind accreditation was to ensure minimum quality standards of private higher education institutions. Since then, such a philosophy has been unchanged and proved to be effective in fulfilling the original objective. However, with progress of times and emergence of education globalization and sophisticated educational technology, the original philosophy has been changed towards the emphasis on quality and expansion of the Accreditation Council mandate to include public institutions as well. Consequently, some quantitative accreditation criteria have been modified to embrace the quality assurance dimension. For example, institution accreditation and re-accreditation criteria has been expanded to involve quality parameters like establishment of alumni unit (to gather information on graduates employment, satisfaction and their needs of continued education), academic ranks of departmental faculty and of Dean's Council (at least 50% professors). Moreover, requirements for program accreditation have been upgraded into greater quality assurance like increasing the minimum number of departmental faculty from 3 to 4 of which at least one member should hold the rank of professor or associate professor. In addition, criteria for faculty academic promotion were reviewed and upgraded, number of departmental annual publications and faculty academic promotions were added to program accreditation criteria when an increase in number of students admitted to that program is requested.

Although the objective of institution or program accreditation criteria is to ensure fulfillment of a minimum quality requirement of the education process, the output of each procedure is judgmental i.e. a permit of how many students a university or program is allowed to admit.

National satisfaction by the accreditation exercise has not been diminished but local experience and international observations have triggered the need for more expansive and deeper application of the accreditation criteria i.e. to include public institutions and to cross the line towards quality management of all higher education institutions, respectively.
THE COMMISSION OF ACCREDITATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Just recently, a draft law of the Commission of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions has been advanced and approved by Jordan's Lower House of Representatives (Parliament). The Upper House of Representatives (Senates) will soon examine the law. Major features of the law can be summarized as follows:

1. The Commission should be independent and self-sufficient.
2. The Commission is chaired by a president (university professor) who should be assisted by two vice-presidents (university professors) and a council comprising eight members from different stakeholders (public and private universities, industry and service sectors).
3. The Commission is authorized to handle both accreditation (as above) and quality assurance of all higher education institutions in Jordan; public and private as well. In addition, the Commission is requested to carry out research on educational issues and to supervise a national testing center which will be held responsible on conducting seasonal qualification exams to all graduates of a given program.

In pursuance of its mandate, the Commission is authorized to impose a wide range of singular or collective penalties ranging from ultimatum to institutional or program permanent closure.

CONCLUSION:

Jordan is heading towards the application of accreditation criteria on all higher education institutions working in the country irrespective of their affiliation, nationality or nature of their financing. In addition to accreditation (as a minimum quality requirement for licensure of a given institution or academic program), quality assurance practices will soon be introduced to all higher education institutions with the establishment of the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions.

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Abstract

Quality Assurance Systems (QAS) are gaining a good deal of momentum all over the world, which are at different levels of maturity and capacity, in various countries. There is an overall agreement for the necessity of effective and efficient quality assurance mechanism. Need for quality assurance, assessment and accreditation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is no longer in question. In this context, stakeholders like NAAC, State Governments under Indian Federal system and HEIs being an integral part of higher education system, promotion of their active participation in creating an enabling environment for quality improvement may be one of the key indicators in QAS. This paper discusses NAAC’s approaches, strategies, resources and the feasible measures that need to be adopted at the national, state and institutional levels to create an encouraging ambience, which in turn facilitate the institutions to move towards quality enhancement, sustenance and academic excellence.
Strategies for the Creation of an Enabling Environment for Quality Assurance in India

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Introduction

NAAC has always believed in making quality a continuous process and the various initiatives of NAAC are aimed at substance of quality in accredited institutions. As a part of post accreditation initiatives, the NAAC is regularly reaching out the accredited higher education institutions with various innovations and healthy practices. NAAC has been promoting quality as a holistic and participatory process. The concerns towards various disadvantaged institutions get reflected in the assessment and accreditation process of NAAC. However, to give further impetus and focussed attention towards these issues, NAAC advocates that all accredited higher education institutions may follow the action plan for promoting IQAC in letter and spirit. NAAC has developed quality indicators not only for assessment purpose but also as an integral part of the overall functioning. All assessors are requested to take into consideration the compliance of these guidelines while arriving at the judgement on institutional quality during the process of accreditation.

Higher educational institutions are being accredited by NAAC to assure quality of education and thus establish credibility. Several criteria and indicators have been developed to provide a base for assessment and accreditation. Most of these indicators reflect academic, administrative, infrastructural, financial and human resources, in addition to internal quality assurance dimensions.

The process of assessment and accreditation has created phenomenal momentum among the academia on issues pertaining to quality and this has largely been due to the flourishing partnership between the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the state governments under Indian Federal system. To give further impetus to the national quality assurance exercise, NAAC suggests that the state governments may establish a State-Level Quality Assurance Coordination Committee (SLQACC) and a Quality Assurance Cell (QAC) to accelerate the quality assurance process by following the guidelines provided by NAAC.

NAAC’s Approach

NAAC has accentuated a three-tier approach for the initiation and sustenance of quality in higher education. At the national level, as the apex quality assurance organization, the NAAC with its authorities would formulate national policies and keep an eye on the implementation. At the state level, the State-Level Quality Assurance Coordination Committee (SLQACC), under the state higher education department, would draw up a state-level action plan in consultation with the NAAC. The Quality Assurance Cell (QAC) will be chiefly under the Commissioner/Director of Higher Education of the state. The QAC will function under the guidance and supervision of the SLQACC. The QAC of
a state would act as the coordination unit between the HEIs of the state and NAAC. At the institutional level, the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in the institution would execute the duty of continuous quality monitoring with the dynamic support of the state QAC.

**Operative strategies**

NAAC advocates that the state governments may constitute a State-Level Quality Assurance Coordination Committee (SLQACC) to hasten the quality assurance process in the respective states, with State Minister of Higher Education as Chairman of the Committee; Secretary of the Higher Education Department as Vice-Chairman; Commissioner, Higher Education as Convener. A few Vice-Chancellors of universities in the state, a few Principals from the state, two or three persons representing stakeholders in higher education as members. SLQACC is the zenith committee for quality under whose guidance the Quality Assurance Cell (QAC), which is the operational administrative unit, shall operate with the following agenda.

- To bring out manuals and related literature on assessment in the regional language.
- To conduct awareness programmes throughout the state.
- To motivate HEIs in the state to undergo the process of assessment and accreditation.
- To assist NAAC in initiating post accreditation quality sustenance measures.
- To follow up the accredited institutions to implement the suggestions given by the peer teams.
- To advise the state government and universities to initiate suitable measures for ascertaining the maintenance of minimum standards.
- To advise NAAC on the quality assurance activities to be taken up by the higher education institutions in the state.

**Execution of the action plan**

SLQACC may form various action groups at university / district levels, to execute the action plan prepared for the state for quality enhancement. Action groups are expected to ensure wider participation of all stakeholders of higher education. These groups would hold periodic meetings, arrange lectures, workshops and also provide feedback to the QAC.

**Resources**

QAC may be headed by an officer from the Directorate of Higher Education, or a Professor on deputation. He/she may be given full-time charge or additional charge of the cell. The salary of the Head, QAC, would be the responsibility of the state government. The office space would be provided by the Directorate. The assistance of the NAAC will be limited to a onetime, non-recurring grant of Rs.80,000/- which may be used for the purchase of items such as computers, office stationery, etc. and a recurring annual grant
of Rs.1,20,000/- towards the payment of contractual staff and other expenditure. The initiative of UGC by way of reimbursement of assessment expenditure through NAAC to all the recognised colleges is another significant financial support.

NAAC may provide the necessary support in the form of partial financial commitments, materials and academic expertise, based on request from the QAC proposing to conduct a seminar/workshop. The state government may consider providing local hospitality, arrangements and related logistics for these seminars/workshops.

**Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC)**

NAAC advocates that all accredited higher education institutions may follow the action plan for promoting an Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) as a post accreditation quality sustenance measure in letter and spirit. Since quality enhancement is a continuous process, IQAC shall become an integral part of an institution’s system and work towards realizing the goals of quality enhancement, sustenance and academic excellence. The work of IQAC is the first step towards the internalization and institutionalization of quality enhancement. Its success depends upon the sense of belongingness and participation it can inculcate in all the constituents of the institution. The IQAC has the potential to become a vehicle for ushering in quality by working out intervention strategies to remove deficiencies and enhance quality. Quality circles in industries operate on similar lines.

The basic purposes of the IQAC are to develop a system for conscious, consistent and catalytic action to improve the academic and administrative performance of the institution to assure all the stakeholders connected with higher education about the quality of education provided by the institutions.

The IQAC will evolve mechanisms and procedures for timely, efficient and progressive performance of academic, administrative and financial tasks; the relevance and quality of academic and research programmes; equitable access to and affordability of academic programmes for various sections of society; optimization and integration of modern methods of teaching and learning; the credibility of evaluation procedures; the adequacy, maintenance and proper allocation of support structure and services; Research sharing and networking with other institutions in India and abroad.

Some of the functions expected of the IQAC are development and application of quality benchmarks/parameters in various activities of the institution; dissemination of information on quality aspects; Organization of discussions, workshops, seminars and promotion of quality circles; documentation of the various programmes / activities leading to quality improvement; acting as a nodal agency of the institution for quality-related activities. preparation of the Annual Quality Assurance Report (AQAR) to be submitted to NAAC based on the quality parameters.

IQAC will facilitate / contribute to a heightened level of clarity and focus in institutional functioning towards quality enhancement and facilitate internalization of the quality
culture; to enhance and integrate various activities of the institution and institutionalize many good practices; to provide a sound basis for decision making to improve institutional functioning; to act as a change agent in the institution to better internal communication

The IQAC may be constituted in every institution under the chairmanship of head of the institution with heads of important academic and administrative units and a few teachers and a few distinguished educationists/ representatives of local committee. The composition of the IQAC may be as follows:
1. Chairperson: Head of the Institution
2. A few senior administrative officers
3. Three to eight teachers
4. One or two members from the Management
5. One/two nominees from local society
6. One of the teachers as the coordinator of the IQAC.

The composition of the IQAC will depend on the size and complexity of the institution. It helps the institutions in planning and monitoring. IQAC also gives stakeholders a cross-sectional participation in the institution’s quality enhancement activities.
It is necessary for the members of the IQAC to shoulder the responsibilities of generating and promoting awareness in the institution and to devote time for working out the procedural details. While selecting these members several precautions need to be taken. A few of them are listed below:
- It is advisable to choose from various backgrounds persons who have earned respect for integrity and excellence in their teaching and research. Moreover, they should be aware of the ground realities of the institutional environment. They should be known for their commitment to improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- It would be appropriate to choose persons in charge of institutional services such as library, computer center, estate, student welfare, administration, academic tasks, examination, and planning and development (senior administrators).
- The management representatives should be persons who are aware of the institution’s objectives, limitations and strengths and are committed to improvement. The local society representatives should be of high standing and should have made significant contributions to society, and, in particular, to education.

The role of the coordinator of the IQAC is crucial in ensuring the effective functioning of all the members. The coordinator of the IQAC may be a senior person with expertise in quality aspects. She/he may be a full-time functionary or, to start with, she/he may be a senior academic/administrator entrusted with the IQAC as an additional responsibility. Secretarial assistance may be facilitated by the administration. It is preferable that the coordinator may have a sound knowledge about the computer, its various functions and usage for effective communication.
IQACs of all the accredited institutions shall submit a self-reviewed progress report annually to NAAC - Annual Quality Assurance Report (AQAR).

**Present scenario**

A good deal of state governments have created an enabling environment for quality assurance by taking a policy decision requiring all the colleges in the state to undergo quality assessment exercise within a stipulated period. As per one of the state government’s order, institutions are compulsorily to submit Self Study Report to NAAC and send a compliance report on the action initiated to QAC. One of the state governments had agreed to provide financial support of Rs. One lakh to each of the IQACs. At present six states have made assessment mandatory and more than 50% of the accredited institutions have established their IQACs.

**Strategies for the future**

- State governments asking the institutions to send the compliance report might be one of the significant decisions in the Indian higher education context, when assessment exercise is voluntary as per NAAC’s philosophy. It is true that ‘compliance culture’ and ‘genuine quality culture’ are two entirely different things and no doubt, it is the latter that needs to be aimed at. But, nonetheless as a way to make a beginning, some push may not be undesirable, particularly when the overall context so demands.

- Establishing QAC at the state level without proper direction and guidelines may not be meaningful. If there is regular interaction and coordination at the state level with all the QACs with specific agenda by providing guidelines from NAAC, QA would be more effective. Mechanism for follow up and action plans may be evolved for the mutual linkage between NAAC and QACs.

- Concerted and coordinated efforts are necessary at various levels to raise the response from the state governments to a higher level. Such efforts are all the more important in case of ‘laggard’ states, that is, those where number of accredited institutions falls below 50%.

- In the laggard states, a mechanism may be evolved to elicit the proactive participation of all the Vice-chancellors in the state to deliberate on measures to achieve time-bound accreditation targets. Each university may prepare an accreditation status report indicating number of colleges accredited and yet to be accredited.

- In some of the states, State Council for Higher Education has been addressing the quality issues very well. Based on the experience of these states, remaining state governments also may think of establishing State Councils for Higher Education in their respective states to enhance and sustain quality in higher education.

- QACs may plan various promotional activities in consultation with State Councils for Higher Education to avoid duplication of activities in the state.

- State governments may grant autonomous status to some of the well established affiliated colleges in the state, to achieve academic excellence in higher education institutions. Also best performing autonomous colleges may be elevated to
deemed university status to enhance accessibility and availability to higher education.

- State governments may think of making accreditation a pre requisite for granting autonomous / deemed university status or giving permission to start restructured programmes or providing any additional financial incentives.
- Best quality teachers are to be appointed purely on their merit by lifting the embargo on teacher recruitment long in place in most of the states and their professional development may be encouraged by the state governments.
- HEIs may adopt and adapt some of the selected best practices which have been practiced by some of the highly rated accredited institutions in different parts of the country. They need to institutionalise and internalise these best practices and finally make them regular practices in heir institutions.
- Initiative may be taken by QAC to study the impact of assessment and accreditation of the selected institutions in the post accreditation period.

Conclusion

Globalization has given rise to new realities in higher education. Of late, India is coming to be increasingly viewed as one of the most favoured higher education destinations with its reputation of marvellously managing ‘iron triangle’ of seemingly incompatible vertices of access, cost and quality in higher education. International compatriots have also acclaimed the NAAC’s process. The International Association of University Presidents (IAUP) has applauded NAAC as one of the 30 trustworthy accrediting agencies of the world. From all indications, no matter what the pros and cons and no matter what the antagonists may say or do, more likely than not, the process of ongoing globalisation is set to intensify. With the foreign education providers likely to become progressively more significant in the Indian higher education scene, the quality assurance and accreditation would assume increasing significance in creating an enabling environment.

NAAC has been awakening to its international persona, particularly so in the recent past. As a member of both INQAAHE and APQN, its active association with the activities of other international bodies in the field is on the increase. It is quality issues that will take centre-stage in higher education in this century and NAAC, almost as a historical inevitability, will have its hands full in the coming years.
References:

Guidelines for the establishment of the State-Level Quality Assurance Coordination Committee (SLQACC) and the Quality Assurance Cell (QAC) (2004): National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), Bangalore.

Guidelines for the Creation of the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in Accredited Institutions (2005): National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), Bangalore.


Abstract: With the development of economic globalization and internationalization of higher education, the quality assurance of higher education has been paid more and more attention internationally since 1990s. China is not an exception. With more than 1700 higher education institutions and infant market economy, how to deal with the relationships among government, professional evaluation bodies and higher education institutions to make sure of quality assurance in the context of centralization of State power in China remains a serious problem. On the basis of making a brief introduction to the situation of Chinese higher education and its quality assurance system, the paper mainly discussed the practices of Chinese quality assurance since 1990s and analyzed problems existing in the system of Chinese quality assurance as well. In addition, some strategies and suggestions are also put forward at the end of paper so as to be used for reference.

I. A glimpse of Higher education and Quality Assurance in China

A. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in China

A great and noticeable advancement has been achieved in China since the expansion policy was put into use in the area of higher education from 1999. By 2004, there were altogether 1731 regular HEIs in China, among which 684 provide undergraduate education and 1047 are postsecondary vocational and technical colleges. There are more than 20 millions of college students studying in various HEIs and the gross enrollment ratio in Chinese higher education has reached 19%.

The Chinese government has initiated two pivotal programs since 1995—Project 211 and Project 985. Project 211 is intended to develop 100 first-class universities and a number of key fields of research for the 21st century in China and Project 985 for developing world-class universities and world-famous research-oriented universities. The universities involved have markedly improved their infrastructure, strengthened their capacity for student education, upgraded their research work, and improved their services for society, and come up with a host of influential research results and findings.
B. Chinese Quality Assurance Agencies

a. At national level

There are two main quality assurance agencies at national level. One is Higher Education Evaluation Center of the Ministry of Education (HEEC) established in August of 2004. HEEC is an administrative body under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. The main responsibility of it is to organize and implement the evaluation of baccalaureate degree programs and associate degree programs offered by institutions of higher education, based on the guidelines, regulations, and evaluation criteria of the MOE.

The other one is China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Center (CDGDC), which was established in 2003, evolving as one department from National Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Center affiliated to Tsinghua University. CDGDC was inaugurated in 1994 with the name of The Evaluation Institute of Academic Degrees & Graduate Education in HEIs then. In 1998, the institute was merged into “National Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Center”, which was changed into “China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Center (CDGDC)” in 2003. CDGDC is an administrative department directly under the Ministry of Education, operating under the joint leadership of The Ministry of Education and The Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council (ADCSC). CDGDC is also a non-profit agency with the independent qualification of legal entity. CDGDC is composed of 6 departments, such as the Evaluation Department and the Accreditation Department etc. Its main function is to engage in scientific researches into academic degrees and graduate education, providing counseling for The Ministry of Education and The Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council in formulating policies concerned and to undertake the task of evaluating and appraising the academic degrees and graduate education, entrusted by The Ministry of Education and The Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council.

Besides the two national agencies above, there is also a nonpermanent organization named National Audit Committee for Establishment (NACE) of New HEIs or Programs in Ministry of Education of China, which deals with the affairs of approval for new establishment of HEIs or programs.

b. At local level

There are about 20 local quality assurance agencies in China, among which the earliest one is Shanghai Educational Evaluation Institution (SEEI) established in 1996. The second earliest one is Jiangsu Educational Evaluation Agency (JEEA) established in 1997. However, agencies in different provinces have different delegated power and conduct different evaluation activities. Some of these local quality assurance agencies are not only in charge of higher education evaluation but also the evaluation of other categories lower than higher education. The local quality assurance agencies in China can be divided into three categories, which are independent like SEEI, JEEA etc, affiliated to HEI or Provincial Academy of education research, such as Liaoning Educational Evaluation Office, and private but
non-profit, such as Jiangxi Higher Educational Evaluation Office etc.

C. Chinese Quality Assurance System of Higher education

Figure 1: Framework of Chinese Higher Education Quality Assurance

![Diagram of Chinese Higher Education Quality Assurance System]

Chinese Ministry of Education

HEEC

NACE of HEIs (Programs)

CDGDC

Local QAAs

HEIs' Internal Quality Assurance offices

Non-governmental bodies

Local educational administration

Note: HEEC refers to Higher Education Evaluation Center of the Ministry of Education; CDGDC refers to China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Center; Local QAA refers to local quality assurance agencies; NACE of HEIs (Programs) refers to National Audit Committee for Establishment of New HEIs (Programs);

Chinese quality assurance system can be simply described as three levels under the frame of law. Therefore, the HEIs will have to be reviewed by national and local agencies as well as its internal quality assurance offices at three levels and from different dimensions. The three-dimensional framework (Figure 1) of Chinese higher education quality assurance has integrated the macro aspects with the micro, combined the internal factors with the external, and unified the strengths of government, institutions and society. We can also name the system “from-top-to-bottom, from-external-to-internal” model of quality assurance.

II. Chinese Practices of quality assurance in higher education

A. Chinese Practices

(1) At National Level

The external quality assurance of higher education in China is the responsibility of government, and central government in particular. The Ministry of Education (MOE) of China has been trying to work for effective ways of assuring quality of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) since the later years of 1980s.

In 1990, the Provisional Regulation on Evaluation of Regular HEIs was issued, which forms the basic embryonic system of China's higher education evaluation.

From 1995 to 2002, MOE of China groped its ways for quality assurance and conducted three types of reviews respectively on different HEIs, which named Acceptable quality-oriented review, Excellence-oriented review and Review at random. There are 254 universities and colleges with 4 years undergraduate courses accepted the kinds of evaluation by the end of 2002, among which 192 HEIs
experienced the Acceptable quality-oriented review, 16 HEIs accepted Excellence-oriented evaluation and 46 HEIs accepted review at random.

In 2003, MOE of China decided to combine the three types of evaluation mentioned above, planning to establish the system of five-year-cycle review of HEIs. Then, MOE drafted 2003-2007 Action Plan for Invigorating Education and it was approved and issued by the State Council in 2004, which makes it clear that all HEIs with 4 years undergraduate courses (592 HEIs in 2002) will have to undergo the review of its instruction quality every five years. At the mean time, MOE also decided that all specialized colleges and polytechnics (about 1100) must undergo the evaluation on its training quality every five years as well from 2004. In order to succeed in implementing the planned evaluation, Higher Education Evaluation Center of the Ministry of Education (HEEC) was established in 2004, whose main responsibility is to organize and implement the evaluation of baccalaureate programs and associate degree programs offered in HEIs.

Whereas HEEC has limited energy and staff, MOE decided to transfer part of evaluation task to local government. Therefore, the evaluation on training quality of all specialized colleges and polytechnics has been carrying out by local government since the second half year of 2005. However, HEEC will have a spot check of 50 institutions every year to supervise the quality of evaluation.

What deserves to be mentioned is that in the nationwide evaluation above, it is MOE who sets up standards and indicators of evaluation or review and makes list of assessors or experts and has the power to determine the final evaluation result.

Up till now, 341 HEIs with four years undergraduate course have undergone the instruction quality review organized by HEEC. There are still 280 HEIs remained to be reviewed in 2007. The detailed information in the following table can be taken for reader’s reference.

Table 1: HEIs reviewed by HEEC in 2003-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year</th>
<th>Number of HEIs reviewed nationwide</th>
<th>Number of HEIs getting “excellent”</th>
<th>Number of HEIs getting “good”</th>
<th>Number of HEIs getting “accepted”</th>
<th>Number of HEIs getting “Not accepted”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20(48%)</td>
<td>19(45%)</td>
<td>3(7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>30(56%)</td>
<td>20(37%)</td>
<td>4(7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>42(56%)</td>
<td>28(37%)</td>
<td>5(7%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>ditto</td>
<td>ditto</td>
<td>ditto</td>
<td>ditto</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: percentage in bracket means proportion accounting for in the HEIs reviewed in that year

(2) At Local Level

The local government is also responsible for the quality assurance of HEIs. With the establishment of socialist market economy, part of the governments function has been on its way of being transferred to non-governmental bodies. So, nearly 20 provincial quality assurance agencies in China have been established successively since the middle of 1990s.
Taking Shanghai Educational Evaluation Institute (SEEI) for example, SEEI is playing an increasingly role in assuring the quality of education at all levels in Shanghai. As far as higher education concerned, SEEI is entrusted by Shanghai Municipal Educational Commission to undertake subject review in HEIs, excellent curriculum and textbook selection Shanghai wide, graduates dissertation review, review of educating process for Master’s degree in HEIs, accreditation of transnational education etc. Besides that, SEEI is also undertaking the evaluation on training quality of specialized colleges and polytechnics in Shanghai as MOE required, and 8 specialized colleges and polytechnics in Shanghai has been evaluated by the end of 2006.

B. Problems and Challenges

China is a country with vast territory and unbalanced development of education. In the course of practicing quality assurance, although the changes in various degrees have taken place in HEIs reviewed, there inevitably exists some problems and challenges which we can’t neglect, too.

(1) Lack of effective connection between national agencies and local ones

The practice of years-evaluation in China shows that there is loose relationship between national agencies and local ones. You go your ways and I’ll go mine. In case of necessity, I’m asked to give you a hand. There is no systematic arrangement for agencies’ duty and business relationship. MOE favors the centralization of evaluation power and local agencies can’t play their roles more fully and effectively. The status quo of quality assurance agencies does no good to agencies’ capacity building and the real improvement of HEIs’ quality.

(2) Lack of assurance of evaluation organized nationally or locally

As we can see from the simple table above, MOE reviewed only several dozens of HEIs in the first 4 years, but there are about 280 HEIs which will be evaluated within next 10 months, i.e. nearly 28 HEIs every month on average by 2007. In this situation, it is difficult to imagine how the evaluation quality can be assured. To some degree, evaluation has become a mere formality in last two years.

On the other hand, most of the local quality agencies are in great need of capacity building and professional staff. There is still a long way to reach high quality of evaluation nationally and locally.

(3) Lack of correct understanding quality assurance agency’s status and role

Affected by the culture of people-worship-official in China, the field of higher education evaluation is full of somewhat official air. No matter national agencies or local ones, they’d like to be working as administrative officials to prove something, not to improve something, which exactly violated the aim of evaluation. Quality assurance agency’s relationship with HEIs and government at different levels needs to be further discussed and identified.

(4) Failing to integrate with the world in the ways of quality assurance

Each country has its own culture and historical background, which has determined that the different countries have to select individualized ways for their quality assurance. In the context of an undeveloped market economy system and with so many HEIs, there is no available experience in the world for China to imitate.
When the audit model, accreditation model, evaluation/review model or the combination of this two or three models are adopted extensively in the developed countries, the single way of top-down model in China fails to integrate with the world in the ways of quality assurance and seems not very suitable and unseasonable. Especially the challenge of mutual recognition of academic qualifications in HEIS as well as transnational higher education requires China to better the existing quality assurance model.

C. Strategies for the future

(1) To establish an organized system of quality assurance agencies

Considering the Complexity, arduousness and particularity of quality assurance in China, establishing an organized system of quality assurance agencies would be a good proposal. In the system, we need to support establishing two new kinds of organizations which are as follows:

a. To establish permanent internal Quality Assurance Office in HEIs to perfect the quality assurance mechanism

Nowadays, most of HEIs have set up relevant offices to make preparation for the coming evaluation, but when the evaluation is over, the office will be cancelled or few of them are maintained. The establishment of permanent internal quality assurance offices will play a key role in the self-quality assurance in HEIs and institutional communication among HEIs.

b. To prepare to establish the National Association of Evaluation in Higher Education to enhance the self-regulation on quality assurance

To establish The National Association of Evaluation in Higher Education will help to improve the quality of evaluation and coordinate the relationship between quality assurance agencies nationally and locally. The function of the National Association of Evaluation in Higher Education will be developing the standards of evaluation with authorized power, undertaking meta-evaluation, conducting accreditation on quality assurance agencies, training assessors, doing research work on evaluation and offering consultant suggestions to MOE etc. In order to help establishing the National Association of Evaluation in Higher Education, the local part may set up local educational evaluation association first. Shanghai has taken the lead in setting up Shanghai Educational Evaluation Association (SEEA) in 2004, whose duty is not only to disseminate and exchange the experience and good practice among its members but also to conduct the accreditation activities as well.

(2) To strengthen the connection among the quality assurance agencies, fully playing the role of local agencies

Before the establishment of the National Association of Evaluation in Higher Education, the connection among the quality assurance agencies should be improved. An effective operating mechanism should be built so that the national and local agencies can work together. On one hand, local agencies should enhance the connection with national agencies voluntarily by submitting report on local experience and proposals for future outlook. On the other hand, communication should be strengthened between local agencies, which can be regarded as spade work so as to form regional group of evaluation in the future. Shanghai and Jiangsu
Province have taken the lead in cooperating in exchanging staff and experience.

(3) To improve the quality of evaluation and make sure of effectiveness of quality assurance

Three ways are suggested to make sure of high quality and effectiveness of quality assurance:

a. All quality assurance agencies must be accredited by National Authoritative authentication organization. If there is no National Authoritative authentication organization for the moment, all agencies must get approved at least by the government in order to make sure of its qualification of conducting evaluation activities.

b. To set up a regular, once-a-year, national system of issuing basic data of instruction in HEIs at the national level so that the situation of instruction in HEIs will be monitored periodically and dynamically. Local agencies can do the same thing to their various evaluation programs via modern media.

c. To make sure of transparent and objective selection of assessors or evaluators. Assessing experts selected must own the certificates identifying his status as assessors. Those who hold administrative positions and academic titles will not be accepted as assessors if they haven’t had any training in prescribed organization.

(4) To learn from other countries and try to keep contact with quality assurance agencies worldwide

Many countries such as the US, Australia, UK, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Japan, India etc have explored good ways of quality assurance which are audit, accreditation, review, accreditation-like evaluation. The regional network like APQN and ENQA and the international network like INQAAHE have been studying good skills and practices of quality assurance and have done hard work in information collection, experience exchange among countries. We will study the experience from other countries and we’d like to share Chinese practices with friends all over the world.

(5) To restructure the power and duty of the government, HEIs and non-governmental bodies in quality assurance

Considering the needs of the socialist market economy, requirements of the internationalization and diversity of Chinese higher education, the existing Chinese framework of quality assurance in higher education needs to be reformed. We suggest restructuring the power and duty among the government, HEIs, professional associations and other non-governmental bodies. The government will pay more attention to policy-making, approval, information statistics and macro-administration nationally and locally. HEIs will focus on the self-quality assurance and keep in touch with professional evaluation agencies. If possible, HEIs may entrust professional agencies to conduct audit to ensure the system of HEIs quality assurance. Professional evaluation agencies will take the advantage of the delegated power to provide the professional service for those who entrust them. The other non-governmental bodies will play its role in enriching the world of educational quality assurance.
Reference paper:
Challenges and Issues in Philippine Higher Education
Quality Assurance: Perspectives from a Developing Country

By:
DR. NENALYN P. DEFENSOR
Commissioner, Commission on Higher Education, Philippines
Keynote Address delivered at the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (INQAAHE) Conference
Toronto, Canada; April 2 to 5, 2007

INTRODUCTION

The Philippine education system departs from the education system of other countries in the Asia Pacific Rim region in a number of ways. It closely resembles the American system of formal education while its neighbors were either influenced by the English, French, or Dutch system. The Philippines has only ten years of basic education while others have twelve or more years. Literacy rate in the country is considerably high.

For many decades, the administration, supervision, and regulation of higher education in the Philippines was vested in a singular body, the Department of Education Culture and Sports through its Bureau of Higher Education. However, for quite a long period, the higher education sector was not given much attention because of the seemingly too many concerns in basic education.

The strong public concern for the improvement of tertiary education led to the passage of a law, Republic Act No. 7722, creating the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), otherwise known as the Higher Education Act of 1994. Among the mandates of the Commission are:

- formulate and recommend development plans, policies, priorities, and programs on higher education and research;
- set minimum standards for programs and institutions of higher learning recommended by panels of experts in the field;
- monitor and evaluate the performance of programs and institutions of higher learning for appropriate incentives as well as the imposition of sanctions;
- identify, support and develop potential centers of excellence in program areas needed for the development of world-class scholarship, nation building and national development;

BASIC FEATURES OF PHILIPPINE HIGHER EDUCATION

1. Significant number of public and private higher education institutions

   The Philippines is an archipelago with more than 7,100 islands, divided into sixteen (16) regions for governance. There are two types of higher education institutions (HEIs) operating in the country, namely: public and private. As of SY 2005-2006, there is a total of 1,683 HEIs, 191 or 11.0 percent are public and 1,492 or 89.0 percent are private.
Public institutions are composed of 111 state universities and colleges, one CHED Supervised Institution, 65 Local Colleges and Universities and 14 other government schools and special HEIs.

While the state universities and colleges are established by law and financially supported by the national government, the private higher education institutions are owned by private groups or individuals organized into corporations. They are classified either as sectarian or non-sectarian colleges and universities. Sectarian institutions are usually non-stock, non-profit institutions owned and operated by religious orders. Non-sectarian institutions are owned by corporations which are not affiliated with any religious organizations.

### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Number of HEIs</th>
<th>% Total</th>
<th>Number of Student</th>
<th>% Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1,683</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>2,431,378</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBLIC (without satellites)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Universities and Colleges</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>833,536</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Universities and Colleges</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>746,269</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHED Supervised Institution</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>80,231</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Government Schools</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>561</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Higher Education Institutions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5,432</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIVATE</td>
<td>1,492</td>
<td>89.0</td>
<td>1,597,842</td>
<td>65.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Sectarian</td>
<td>1,134</td>
<td>1,101,266</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sectarian</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>496,576</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Large college student population

The system has a large college student population with a total of about 2,431,378 students as of 2006 (Table 1). Of this number, 34.3 percent is accounted for the public sector while 65.7 percent comes from the private HEIs.

3. Diversity in program offerings

A variety of higher education programs are being offered by both the public and private HEIs. The cluster of Business and Management programs has traditionally been the most oversubscribed with the highest number of HEIs offering the programs and having the highest enrolment among the disciplinary areas. In the early 90s, Information Technology became very attractive, many institutions offered varied programs. Then starting 2002, because of the perceived very high demand for nurses abroad, a boom in the Nursing program was observed, with many HEIs opening the program and massive student influx into the program. As a consequence, there is a declining trend now in enrolment in the engineering programs, sciences, liberal arts, and other health related programs. As of 2005, *a variety of approximately* 12,000 higher education programs are being offered by the HEIs in the country.
The creation of CHED was part of a broad agenda for reforms in the country's education system, outlined by the Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM) in 1992. Part of the reforms is the trifocalization of the education sector. At present, the three governing bodies in the education sector are the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) for undergraduate and graduate education, the Department of Education (DepEd) for basic education, and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) for non-degree technical-vocational and middle level education.

The Quality Assurance Framework

The quality assurance framework for higher education revolves around the three major functions of a university or college: instruction, research, and extension. As shown in Figure 1, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, public accountability, outcomes and impact to nation-building comprise the key elements of the framework.

FIGURE 1
Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

There are two types of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms: program-based and institutional. Program-based mechanism refers to academic programs while institutional mechanism refer to the institution as a whole. Figure 2 shows these mechanisms.

**PROGRAM-BASED**

- CHED authority to operate programs
  - Permit Phase
  - Recognition Phase
- CHED Standard Setting
  - Policies Standards & Guidelines provide for minimum standards (mandatory; CHED assisted by Technical Panels and Regional Quality Assessment Teams)
- Accreditation – Levels I to IV
  - Conducted by accrediting bodies under FAAP and NNQAA (voluntary in nature)
- International Certifications
  - APEC Registry; Washington Accord; ISO 9000 and others

**INSTITUTIONAL**

- CHED Institutional Monitoring and Evaluation for Quality Assurance (IQuAME)
- Assessment for SUC Levelling
- International Recognition
  - Baldridge Award (Philippine Quality Award)

**FIGURE 2**

By virtue of RA 7722, the Commission has the authority to open or close academic programs. There are two phases in the operation of programs, the permit phase and the recognition phase. Issuance of government authority to operate the program requires full compliance by the HEIs with the minimum standards prescribed by the CHED.

With the assistance of the Technical Panels composed of experts in the different clusters of disciplines, the Commission has formulated the minimum standards for the various academic programs embodying the minimum requirements in terms of curriculum, faculty members, physical facilities, laboratories and equipment, library holdings and other support services. The deputized Regional Quality Assessment Teams composed of experts from the academe, industry, and professional associations provide technical assistance to the CHED Regional Offices in evaluating the extent of compliance of the HEIs with existing minimum standards.
Another program-based mechanism is accreditation which is through self-regulation and peer evaluation. Accreditation status of the program is granted by the accrediting agencies when the institution has the facilities and resources for the program which are over and above the minimum requirements. It is voluntary in nature and it provides public recognition and information on the quality of education being provided by the HEIs. Depending on the capability of the institution and the extent of the available facilities and resources, there are four accreditation levels being granted to the HEIs by the accrediting bodies – Level I, Level II, Level III, and Level IV.

There are two federations or networks of accrediting bodies in the Philippines. The Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines is the umbrella organization of accrediting agencies authorized to certify the accredited status of programs of private schools. FAAP is composed of the following accrediting agencies, namely, Association of Christian Schools and Colleges Accrediting Agency, Inc.; the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities; the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation; and the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities of the Philippines. On the other hand, the National Network of Quality Assurance Agencies is the umbrella network which is also recognized by the CHED to certify the accredited status of the public institutions. NNQAA is composed of the Association of Accredited Chartered Colleges and Universities of the Philippines and the Association of Local Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation.

All the accrediting agencies are significantly helping CHED in the promotion of quality improvement in the HEIs. It can be noted that the accreditation status of the programs of HEIs serves in a number of ways:

a. Levels of accreditation are used by CHED as a major criterion in the identification of Centers of Excellence or Centers of Development which entitles the HEIs financial support from the Commission for their flagship projects and programs.

b. Levels of accreditation is also a major criterion by CHED in the selection of private schools to be granted autonomous or deregulated status with certain benefits to be enjoyed.

c. Level III accreditation status in the corresponding undergraduate program is used by CHED as a major requirement for HEIs applying for government authority to open new graduate programs, offer distance and open learning programs and conduct of extension classes/programs.

d. Accreditation status of the program is used by CHED in the identification of priority programs and in the allocation of student scholarship slots to the HEIs as well as in granting faculty development assistance.

As of 2005, out of the 12,000 higher education programs being offered in the country, a total of only 1,550 programs are accredited. Of these, 321 programs have level I accredited status, 1,049 with level II accredited status and 180 with level III accredited status.

Another program-based mechanism are international recognitions which are awarded by independent bodies to the HEIs such as ISO certifications and the like. The institutions seek international certifications to ensure that the systems, procedures
and processes they adopt conform with international standards of quality management.

At the institutional level, the CHED developed the following: Institutional Monitoring Evaluation for Quality Assurance and Criteria for State Universities and Colleges Levelling. These are mechanisms set in place to determine the overall performance of the HEIs in different aspects and thereby make classification or categorization of institutions according to various levels of quality.

Accountability

Public accountability is inherent in the functions of public offices tasked with the responsibility of overseeing quality education. The CHED undertakes its task of monitoring and evaluating the performance of HEIs in the Philippines with funding through its Higher Education Development Fund. The aim is to promote quality and access in higher education, make the system relevant and responsive to emerging needs, and ensure effective and efficient management of the system. A number of developmental programs and projects have already been undertaken by CHED to strengthen the higher education system in the country. Currently, the CHED is implementing a project on the Higher Education Development Program and one of the components is a project on quality assurance.

Outcomes

The outcomes of all efforts towards quality education are directed to attaining the following goals: identification of more programs as Centers of Excellence and Centers of Development which apply to both public and private schools, granting of autonomous and deregulated status to selected private HEIs, good performance in licensure examinations for all schools and world class researches and extension services. See Figure 3.

Center of Development is an acknowledgment granted by CHED to an institution in view of its performance in its academic program and the potential to
provide excellent education in the future. It is a designation given to an institution as evidenced by above average performance in teaching, research and extension functions. On the other hand, Center of Excellence is a distinction bestowed upon an institution which has outstandingly accomplished its academic duties to benefit stakeholders and the community at large. It is a designation given to an institution which demonstrates exemplary performance in its teaching, research and extension functions.

The CHED grants autonomous or deregulated status to deserving private colleges and universities which have consistently shown exemplary performance in the provision of education, research and extension with corresponding benefits to be enjoyed such as some degree of freedom in their internal operations, curricular deregulation, opening of new programs, extension classes and distance education for autonomous HEIs without securing approval from the Commission.

Impact on Nation Building and National Development

The Commission hopes that by aggressively pushing for quality education, the Philippines will be able to meet the Millennium Development Goals: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empowerment; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat dreaded diseases; ensure environmental sustainability and develop global partnership for development.

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES IN INSTITUTING QUALITY ASSURANCE MECHANISMS IN PHILIPPINE HIGHER EDUCATION

For more than a decade now, the Commission has been exerting so much effort to improve the quality of higher education in the country. Different schemes, mechanisms or strategies have been instituted and implemented. However, in the process of implementation, a lot of bottlenecks are encountered and hence substantial results have not yet been attained so far. Following are some of the issues, concerns and challenges with regard to setting quality assurance mechanisms in higher education:

1. Issue:

   Only a small proportion of the total 1,683 HEIs can be considered as offering very good quality programs as shown by the number of programs accredited by recognized accrediting agencies, the number of programs identified as Centers of Excellence (COEs) and Centers of Development (CODs) by CHED, the number of private HEIs granted by CHED autonomous and deregulated status, and number of HEIs with national or international recognition for their programs. It can be observed that many HEIs operate programs within the parameters of the minimum standards only and in some cases even below the minimum standards.

   Challenge:

   There is a need for the Commission to develop a very good policy environment in the system of giving incentives to encourage many HEIs to pursue vigorous efforts towards instituting quality assurance mechanisms in their institutions. Likewise, an effective system of sanctions also needs to be developed to stop the HEIs in offering substandard programs.
2. Issue:
Performance of graduates in licensure examinations being conducted by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) is one indicator of quality of graduates of the HEIs. For the past several years though, data shows that in majority of the programs, the performance of graduates in licensure examinations has been declining. In effect, this also indicates that the quality of program offerings of many institutions is deteriorating. Let me give you a case in point.

For years, the teacher education program has been a continuing concern of Philippine Higher Education. Data from the Professional Regulation Commission for the past ten years show that the percentage of those who fail the licensure examinations is bigger than those who pass.

### TABLE 2
LICENSURE EXAMINATION FOR TEACHERS (1996 to 2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE PASSED</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE FAILED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>ELEMENTARY</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>73.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SECONDARY</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>71.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>ELEMENTARY</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SECONDARY</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>ELEMENTARY</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SECONDARY</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>71.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>ELEMENTARY</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>66.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SECONDARY</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>65.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>66.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>ELEMENTARY</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SECONDARY</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>64.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>ELEMENTARY</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>66.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>ELEMENTARY</td>
<td>SECONDARY</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Hongkong)</td>
<td>55.8%</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>35.31%</td>
<td>36.51%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>64.69%</td>
<td>63.49%</td>
<td>64.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>26.25%</td>
<td>26.29%</td>
<td>26.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73.75%</td>
<td>73.71%</td>
<td>73.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>26.95%</td>
<td>21.15%</td>
<td>27.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>73.05%</td>
<td>78.85%</td>
<td>72.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>27.50%</td>
<td>25.89%</td>
<td>26.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>72.49%</td>
<td>74.10%</td>
<td>73.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>29.28%</td>
<td>32.46%</td>
<td>30.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70.72%</td>
<td>67.54%</td>
<td>69.22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Challenge:
The Commission is faced with the task of doubling its efforts in updating policies and standards for each program. For teacher education, a new curriculum has been devised. Likewise, the intensive training of student teachers has been instituted.
3. Issue:
   Quality assurance mechanisms should be viewed in a holistic rather than piecemeal basis to bring out the best in Philippine higher education.

   Challenge:
   Among the existing accrediting agencies in the country, there is a need to review and determine comparability of their standards, criteria and evaluation instruments. It is necessary to establish uniform systems and processes and set comparable standards in granting accreditation status to the programs of the HEIs. Moreover, public and private accrediting agencies should not view each other as competitors rather treat each other as complementary.

4. Issue:
   One of the trilogy of functions of a college or university is research. However, many HEIs have poor research capability and in some cases there is the absence of a research culture. As one of the quality indicators, the HEIs need to harness their capability on research along with the improvement in the delivery of their educational services.

   Challenge:
   While the Commission has provided incentives for higher education research, still the research-based culture in Philippine higher education institutions with a few exceptions remains elusive. As one Philippine university professor has succinctly articulated: “the management of a research culture is a mix of simple to complex factors and processes which must be attended to and nurtured by inspiration, expectations, role definitions, monitoring and incentives. While there are many factors that relate to the development and nurturance of a research culture, the following seem to stand out:

   - University research agenda that cascades to the faculty
   - Support of the management that is communicated to the faculty
   - Competence and confidence of the faculty
   - Existing organizational structure for research
   - Visible incentives for the faculty
   - Research-related rituals, practices and tradition including team research and mentorship
   - Credibility of the research manager (Ochave, 2006)

5. Issue:
   The HEIs are turning out too many graduates every year, and aside from the issue of low absorptive capacity of the labor market, the quality of graduates is also an issue. It can be observed that there is mismatch between the knowledge and skills acquired by the graduates and what the industry needs.

   Challenge:
   The Philippine government and not only the Commission has been trying to address this issue. A forthcoming manpower summit between the Commission and the Department of Labor has been slated to determine what are the courses with the highest potential of job marketability.
CONCLUSION:

In pursuance of its mandate, the Commission has undertaken major initiatives in quality assurance. These initiatives however, have an over-arching goal: to develop the Philippines as a regional knowledge center in the Asia-Pacific region especially in disciplines where Philippine HEIs have a distinctive competitive edge.
Abstract

Collaborations with other institutions nationally and internationally is often cited by accrediting agencies as one of the criteria for evaluating program effectiveness, and this is most applicable for Information Technology (IT) programs. Given the nature of the IT discipline — free flow of information that completely blurs national boundaries — it is obligatory to enhance student and faculty awareness of IT practices around the world to enhance the quality of the educational programs. There are several mechanisms to accomplish this goal; some of the most effective are faculty and student visits to international educational institutions, student internships in foreign countries, and collaborations for teaching and research. Results of a survey of 15 students and 15 faculty on their experiences of multiple international activities and events are discussed.

Introduction

Quality assurance and assessment standards make an enormous difference to the educational environment. When programs meet expectations, students take them for granted, and are usually unaware of the role played by accrediting agencies in raising levels of quality. Programs that are not accredited can be of poor quality or may not fulfill educational expectations in terms of student outcomes, faculty expertise, curricular guidelines, or resources. Thus, accreditation is vital to promote consistently high standards; further, accreditation must become an integral part of the daily functioning of an academic institution rather than an episodic event to result in overall continuous program improvement. A continued update is even more critical for information technology (IT), or Information Systems (IS), or Telecommunications disciplines where technology changes so quickly. For the purpose of this article, these programs will be referred to by a common title of Information Technology (IT).

Status of IT Program Accreditation — Worldwide

Different IT programs fulfill different missions and serve different student populations. There are significant differences between the baccalaureate programs in IT that are currently offered; therefore, it is difficult to speak of a generic IT baccalaureate degree. At the same time, one common trend places student outcomes assessment at the top of quality assurance standards. This practice began in the 1980s, but gathered strength during the 1990s as accrediting agencies focused on attaining educational objectives, particularly those related to student learning [1]. Among the many outcomes, employability is a necessary competency for college graduates [2].
Accreditation of IT Programs in Countries Outside the U.S.

In Canada, IT program accreditation is a formal industry-driven auditing process involving assessment against a specific set of core and technical skills standards [3]. The objectives of accreditation primarily include identification of those IT programs meeting industry standards, which provides a professional judgment about the quality of the educational programs. The Australian Computer Society has specified a core body of knowledge — a minimum set of subject matter which is recommended should be included in all IT programs [4]. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — have established IT programs in partnership or affiliation with American universities [5]. The foreign universities operating their campuses are accredited or recognized by the relevant education authorities in their home country. Steps have been taken by the local accreditation boards to modify the curriculum to suit the requirements of the local market.

Accreditation of IT Programs in the U.S.

In the US, efforts got underway in 2001, when a meeting of interested parties from fifteen four-year IT programs along with representatives from IEEE-CS (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers-Computer Society), ACM (Association for Computing Machinery), Association for Information Systems (AIS), and ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology) began work on the formalization of Information Technology as an accredited academic discipline [6]. Since then, three main efforts have proceeded in parallel: 1) Definition of accreditation standards for IT programs, 2) Creation of a model curriculum for four-year IT programs, and 3) Description of the characteristics that distinguish IT programs from the sister disciplines in computing.

The Computing Sciences Accreditation Board (AIS+ACM+IEEE-CS) is the lead society within ABET for accreditation of programs in computer science, information systems, and software engineering, and is a cooperating society for accreditation of computer engineering, but currently there is no external accreditation body specifically for Information Technology degree programs [6]. The IT programs at renowned institutions like Illinois Institute of Technology are only accredited by state or regional bodies like Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools [7].

Why International Collaborations?

IT educational programs in the US grew rapidly in the last decade, to fulfill employment needs of businesses, both big and small that embraced the Y2K update followed by a burst in online applications [8]. The offshore model came of age due to the urgency and necessity of Y2K, when numerous offshore IT companies were hired to assist in the massive enterprise of updating critical system code [9]. The practice of exporting IT work has grown manifold since, both in terms of labor volume as well as diversity, depth, and complexity of projects undertaken.
The outsourcing of business processes and operations around the globe blurs the boundaries of enterprises’ IT systems [10]. This does not mean that computer science can be culture free. Unlike such subjects as mathematics and physics, its effective application requires practitioners to tailor the systems they develop to the needs of the local community in which they will be used. In addition, working in multicultural teams involves an understanding of cultural differences if the collaboration is not to founder [11]. Employers are increasingly looking for employees who have had an international experience [12]. The worldwide popularity of IT degree programs is fueled by continued job opportunities for these graduates.

**Effects of Global Economy on IT Education**

The Association of American Colleges and Universities studied desired student learning outcomes of an undergraduate education, and published a table that was drawn together from a variety of sources: the standards of regional and specialized accreditation agencies from across the country, from best practices articulated by educational associations, from qualities sought by employers, and from contributions of faculty and administrators at various colleges and universities [1]. The table demonstrates a widespread and growing consensus; two relevant outcomes include: 1) Intercultural knowledge and collaborative problem-solving skills, and 2) Integrative thinking and the ability to transfer knowledge from one setting to another.

In a global economy, it is no longer enough for a state to compare itself with the state next door; they need to compare themselves against world standards. Investments in IT education need to benchmark best practices wherever they are found. More and more universities seek to pursue agreements for collaborative programs with international partners to nurture certain essential qualities that will give their graduates an edge in a fast-changing global economy. Global education implies that students are educated across disciplinary and geographical boundaries — beyond the content knowledge of a particular discipline in a specific country [13]. Benefits go far beyond academic learning — enabling students to develop broader perspectives on their academic field of study and an ability to develop skills in cross-cultural communication, adaptability, and critical thinking applicable to everyday life. Colleges and universities are encouraged and sometimes mandated to find ways to introduce their students to diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural situations and learning, but most educators know little about education in other countries [14].

**Mechanisms for International Collaborations**

The three main ways in which an international dimension can be added to student learning are student and teacher exchanges, joint projects involving real or virtual collaboration, and study abroad. There is wide variety of international experiences which fall under the general category of study abroad programs; these include: summer or semester abroad, dual-degree, short immersive experience in a foreign country, internship in a foreign country, and course taught by foreign faculty.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate international academic experiences of students and faculty and determine most effective mechanisms for enhancing global education. The study was limited to US students and faculty with experience in an academic environment in Asia, because Asia is significantly diverse with respect to the US culture and educational setting. The following research questions were developed to establish a basis for the methodology:

1. What are the most effective mechanisms for enhancing global education for faculty in IT?
2. What are the most effective mechanisms for enhancing global education for students in IT?

Methodology

A mail questionnaire was developed and utilized as the primary data collection tool. Specific items and lists for particular questions were originally generated by the author. The questionnaire was reviewed by several faculty in international business and IT. This input resulted in revisions to the survey instrument. A pilot test was administered to a representative group of both faculty and students at the author’s home institution, which helped to further refine the instrument.

The author prepared a list of IT or IS or Telecommunications programs at many major universities and colleges accredited by either ABET, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, New England Association of Schools and Colleges, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, or Western Association of Schools and Colleges to identify potential participants. A total of over 90 student and faculty questionnaires were sent to the Chairs of relevant departments with a request that the questionnaire be forwarded to appropriate faculty members and students. The response rate was 23% for faculty and 29% for students. The study was further limited to a survey of: 1) 15 students who had spent at least two weeks in the host country in an information technology program, and received academic credit for that experience, and 2) 15 faculty who had spent at least two months teaching/conducting research related to IT at an educational institution in Asia. The students and faculty were selected based on their exposure to multiple international events and activities, even at the home institution.

Results and Discussion

Data analysis for this study is primarily descriptive. Frequency distributions are used to determine response percentages for various respondent categories. Mean scores and standard deviations provide relative agreement for items and a measure of the degree of consensus for each response. More sophisticated analysis and statistical comparisons are not appropriate since the cell size is not sufficient for additional tests.

Tables 1 and 2 provide results of a comparative study of academic environment, while Tables 3 and 4 give insight into student and faculty perspectives on the
effectiveness of various international programs and activities. Values are means ± standard deviation of evaluations, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest rating.

Table 1. Student Feedback on Different Attributes of Academic Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Home Country</th>
<th>Host Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Content</td>
<td>3.8 ± 0.1</td>
<td>4.2 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Relevance to Workplace</td>
<td>4.1 ± 0.1</td>
<td>3.4 ± 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>3.8 ± 0.1</td>
<td>3.1 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Quality</td>
<td>4.1 ± 0.1</td>
<td>3.6 ± 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Quality</td>
<td>4.3 ± 0.1</td>
<td>4.4 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Student Interactions</td>
<td>3.9 ± 0.1</td>
<td>3.5 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Faculty Feedback on Different Attributes of Academic Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Home Country</th>
<th>Host Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Content</td>
<td>4.5 ± 0.1</td>
<td>4.4 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Relevance to Workplace</td>
<td>4.3 ± 0.1</td>
<td>3.9 ± 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>3.9 ± 0.1</td>
<td>3.2 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Quality</td>
<td>4.4 ± 0.1</td>
<td>4.1 ± 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Quality</td>
<td>4.1 ± 0.1</td>
<td>4.4 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Student Interactions</td>
<td>4.2 ± 0.1</td>
<td>3.8 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Student Feedback on Effectiveness of Different International Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study Abroad (minimum 2 weeks)</td>
<td>4.5 ± 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship in a foreign country</td>
<td>4.7 ± 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to a foreign country</td>
<td>2.5 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminars at home institution by an intern</td>
<td>2.9 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take class taught by an international visiting faculty</td>
<td>2.4 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint research with international students at home</td>
<td>3.2 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint research with international students over Internet</td>
<td>3.9 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Faculty Feedback on Effectiveness of Different International Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teach Abroad (minimum 2 weeks)</td>
<td>4.6 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit to a foreign country</td>
<td>3.8 ± 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminars at home institution by an intern</td>
<td>4.1 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach international students</td>
<td>3.6 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint research with international faculty at home</td>
<td>3.6 ± 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint research with international faculty (travel involved)</td>
<td>4.7 ± 0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data shows that being in a foreign country for studying, teaching, working, or doing research is most beneficial and has tremendous educational value. Involvement in collaborative international research and scholarship is valuable. Based on the participants’ open-ended comments, a major impact of an international experience, even if it is only for two weeks, is increased awareness and appreciation of both the vast and
subtle differences in ideas and value systems. Studying abroad or in an ethnically diverse context is described metaphorically as an academic, cultural, intellectual and emotional journey that facilitates the acquisition of intercultural competencies as well as personal growth [15]. It is stressed that universities have much to gain from approaching internationalization and ethnic diversity in an integrated fashion with regards to instructors, students, and curriculum.

Organizations need employees who will maintain and enhance business competitiveness in a global, rather than purely local, market. Governments strive to achieve a workforce that can function at the cutting edge of the knowledge economy in order to provide sustainable prosperity for all their citizens. Students and faculty need to be prepared to operate in a global environment. For students, the primary personal driver for international learning is career enhancement and broader personal enrichment. Research by the American Council on Education in 2001 suggested that 88% of US students believed that international education would give them a competitive advantage in the workforce [16]. A report for the UK’s Higher Education Policy Institute goes even further, stating: there is perhaps only one main factor that influences individual behavior in terms of its effect on the international higher education scene — the fact that higher education is increasingly seen as a route to good employment [17]. The European Commission funds large schemes to promote collaborative education and research for its member nations.

For many students, opportunities for study in international settings may be limited by lack of language proficiency, financial resources, maturity, and self-confidence, or the unavailability of comparable academic programs. International perspectives can be woven into the curriculum by analyzing communication standards, business practices, telecommunications laws, and ethics prevalent in different countries or continents [18]. The presence of more international scholars on campus, greater participation in study abroad programs, expanded area studies programs, events with global themes, and international internships are key activities that enhance student learning [19]. When foreign students study in the US, it is typically because of a shortage of university places at home, because students and their families perceive that they can access more prestigious and career beneficial programs abroad (for example, UK students going to Harvard), or because higher degrees or highly specialized subject areas are not on offer locally.

Summary

For more than half a century, accreditation—both institutional and specialized—has played a central role in promoting accountability and quality assurance in higher education. Knowledge has become a critical global commodity; hence, a university needs to measure its educational and research programs by benchmarking itself against leading universities worldwide. Today’s graduates must not only have advanced skills but also a global perspective to be successful in life and work. IT is the basic building block for corporate systems everywhere. The career opportunities in IT require students to know both the technology and the business and environment in which they will work. IT is inherently international but its effective application depends on an understanding of the local culture in which it is being used; students and faculty need to be prepared to operate in this global environment. Economic globalization has obligated quality higher
education programs to educate students about issues and practices in other parts of the world. Student and faculty exchanges promote cultural understanding, build a learning society, globalize the information society, develop entrepreneurs and help make society more socially responsible. Spreading and integrating the learning environment by building a setup that enables the mutual sharing of the world’s educational resources is vitally important to higher education.

References


Abstract

International recognition of qualifications has acquired increasing importance in the globalization process, and has been acknowledged as an area of priority by international agencies like UNESCO. The current systems and procedures are costly, unfair and inefficient. Students are its most obvious victims. It is argued that the real challenge is not so much in ensuring identical or similar programs, but in ensuring a system of comparison that can identify learning outcomes and gaps. Adopting a ‘learning outcome’ based approach will facilitate development of a system that can quickly detect differences and measure these gaps in learning. The role of external quality assurance agencies in this process is highlighted.

Introduction

Globalization has started to blur distinctions between the local and the international in higher education as much as in other areas of socio-economic life. Some examples of these trends are

- Increasing cooperation among institutes of higher education in program delivery
- Cross-border international education, e.g. twinning programs offered alternately in a home and a foreign country
- Greater mobility of people across national boundaries for migration, employment and education

The above trends have all added to the complex challenges of developing and using a fair, transparent and efficient process of establishing equivalency, and of granting recognition to qualifications obtained in a country other than the one granting recognition. This is part of the larger problem of mutually agreed reference points in qualifications frameworks, levels, standards, quality assurance systems and accreditation. Resolving this issue would be the first steps towards an internationally agreed framework of educational quality. Although there is divergence in several areas of higher education design and delivery, there also appears to be some convergence in methodologies and approaches to quality assurance, accreditation and recognition. External quality assurance agencies have an important role to play in this process.
A) INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

1) Requirements

There is broad agreement among educational experts, as represented in the UNESCO publications, that traditional methods of recognition of qualifications need to change in order to accommodate fundamental changes in globalization and the variety and formats of higher education delivery. The traditional tools of recognition have the following elements.

1. Admission requirements
2. List of courses
3. Length of programs (duration etc)

These tools focus on the input or process dimensions and do not utilize the learning outcomes, competencies, and skills that result from the academic process. These tools therefore are unlikely to serve the purpose of recognition in the 21st century, where following requirements are necessary:

1. Transparency in terms of qualifications
2. Comparability in terms of learning outcomes
3. Skills and competencies gained as a result of the academic process
4. Learner empowerment regarding availability of information

These requirements are essential if employers, educational institutions, and credential verification agencies have to make decisions about recognition of foreign qualifications of an increasingly mobile pool of international professionals and learners. Their needs for comparison and recognition are driven by an element of trust that the qualifications under consideration are associated with a quality of delivery and certain competencies and skills required for employment, admission, and credit transfer decisions. If a fair, transparent, and reliable basis of comparison is missing, these decisions are likely to carry unfavourable outcomes for the stakeholders, of whom the learners are the most vulnerable. This vulnerability increases as the complexity of the learning pathways and options increases, as for example when learners move across borders, re-enter the learning process, and acquire their qualifications through a variety of educational providers at different stages of their life and career.

2) Status of recognition

Despite the recommendations by UNESCO through its committees and regional bodies, the recognition process is

- Continues to lack transparency, fairness, and consumer protection for learners
- Places burden of proof on learners
- Has not been received due attention from credential verification agencies, national/regional bodies (with the exception of European Council) and QA agencies
3) Current tools of recognition

Most current tools as outlined above use elements which have consequences that are not always favourable to the learners and are based on the following methodology

   i) Recognition/Accreditation by national bodies
   ii) Rankings and ratings
   iii) Verification of credentials and qualifications through learners own resources from home countries, at learners cost

This process often takes weeks, months and in some reported cases, more than a year. This happens in cases where the learners have left the country of origin, and the higher education institutes have neither the resources nor procedures for meeting requests for verification of documents except through cumbersome processes. Secondly, when the verification is complete, the process of comparison and granting credit for prior learning is undertaken on the basis of current transcripts and their comparability to the host country’s own qualification framework. The two are not always easy to compare, as the essential elements, e.g. competencies and skills actually gained as a result of the qualifications are not stated. Two similar courses or programs may have varying degrees of competencies and skills associated with their goals, objectives and intended learning outcomes.

4) Outcomes of recognition for different stakeholders

Different stakeholders involved in the international recognition have different options available to them to deal with the issues. All stakeholders are not equally empowered. Once again, it is the learner who suffers most.

   i) Employers may choose to ignore the formal qualifications and focus on individual competencies and skills. They may assess these skills independently of any formal qualifications documents, and the outcomes may be either positive or negative for the learners. Alternative methods of assessment include behavioural interviews, assessment centers, performance based tests etc. The positive outcome for learner occurs when the competencies and skills required by the employer, and associated with the qualification, matches with the competencies actually possessed by the learner ( “learning outcomes”) and the gaps are minimal or negligible. Negative outcomes ensue when there are gaps.

   ii) Educational Institutions may make decisions about prior learning without a fair and reliable comparison. This happens when transcripts and courses do not provide sufficiently detailed information about the course and program learning outcomes. In the interest of meeting enrolment targets, educational institutions may admit ineligible students who may encounter problems later. Alternatively, they may deny admission or prior learning credits partially or wholly, because of lack of transparent and fair comparability.
B) PROPOSAL FOR REFORM IN RECOGNITION PRACTICES

It is proposed that in order to adapt recognition systems to the global developments in higher education reforms and develop fair and transparent tools, external QA agencies should initiate following reforms

1) **Empower learners: a moral and ethical imperative**

External QA agencies need to adopt features of the European Region framework and initiatives which recommend empowerment of learners. There are moral and ethical reasons for this initiative since learners are most vulnerable and bear most of the negative consequences of the recognition process. There are reports from countries of how learners have to often take legal action to obtain their rights. For example, it was recently reported that a student filed a legal suit to get his assessment reviewed and obtain answer scripts of examination to challenge assessment results. This outcome can be avoided if a fair and transparent assessment process is used providing recourse to academic appeals in case of a grievance. In another case, the industry association of a country produced a report recently which stated that a large majority of engineers produced by the higher education institutions are not employable, i.e. they do not have competencies and skills required by employers. The government responded by announcing the establishment of ‘finishing schools’ to develop the necessary skills so that these graduates are employable. Why haven’t appropriate QA agencies intervened to question the goals, objectives and intended learning outcomes of the programs which produce these unemployable graduates in the first place? Why are questions not being raised about internal quality procedures which could ensure appropriate learning outcomes to be established for the programs? The ultimate victims are the learners who do not have any information about the value of education they receive until it is too late, and who encounter assessment policies which lack transparency and coherence.

2) **Encourage adoption of learning outcomes based approach**

It is argued that adopting an outcomes based approach towards education would have several benefits.

i) It will lead to a change in focus from teaching to learning in all aspects of program delivery and outcomes.

ii) Enhance clarity about goals and objectives, including teaching, assessment and outcomes.

iii) The academic courses, programs and qualifications will have more coherence and transparency and will lead to greater comparability in terms of learning outcomes, skills and competencies.
3) Current international initiatives

UNESCO has held a number of conventions on the issue of international recognition of qualifications, and is currently working to support regional, national and international organizations to develop this capacity. The UNESCO Recognition Conventions have been initiated in all the six major regions. The European Region has however implemented most of the recommendations and produced a framework which could serve as a model for all other regions. The Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997) together with the ‘Bologna Process’ has led to what is called the Framework of Qualifications. The Bologna Process is an agreement by 45 countries of Europe to establish a completely borderless European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010, permitting complete mobility and a fair and efficient recognition of qualification of learners. UNESCO has also initiated a number of networks to facilitate this process along with the Council of Europe and the European Commission, like ENIC and NARIC.

ENIC and NARIC have set a target date for completing development of this process by 2010, starting in 2007, so that qualifications acquired in one country are recognized elsewhere.

The differences in the educational systems are likely to remain though some convergence is noticeable. The absence of mutually developed and accepted standards for international recognition of qualification creates delays and difficulties for proposed reforms in higher education and recognition. A borderless education does not imply identical or similar programs, or an imposition of uniformity. What it does imply is that differences and variations can be easily detected, identified, and measured. As such, the qualification in terms of courses and programs can be placed on a scale that will facilitate comparison for determining equivalency.

4) Summary of initiatives and recommendations of UNESCO/ENIC/NARIC

The Bologna Process has led to the following recommendations by its various follow up groups to which ENIC/NARIC have pledged their support.

i) A shift in focus of recognition in favour of the learner

ii) Shift from a formal recognition to more substantial and sophisticated assessment

iii) Shift from academic towards labour market and professional recognition

For individual assessment for recognition, it has been proposed that competent recognition authorities/assessment agencies should focus on the learning outcomes and competencies, as well as the quality of delivery of an educational program and to consider its duration as merely one indication of the level of achievement reached at the end of the program.

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2 NARIC (Network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres) and ENIC (European Network of National Information Centres on Academic Recognition and Mobility) are international information networks which promote the recognition of foreign qualifications.
3 Council of Europe Recommendation # 40, Strasbourg, 2002
5) Edinburgh Bologna Seminar on Learning Outcomes

At the Edinburgh Seminar held in June 2004, the use of learning outcomes to facilitate the achievement of aims of Bologna Process was discussed. It was agreed that using the concept of learning outcomes as statements of what learners are expected to know, understand and/or be able to do at the end of a period of learning have important implications for higher education reform in the 21st century, particularly for curriculum design, teaching and learning, assessment and frameworks of qualifications. Learning outcomes are likely to be the building blocks for the design of an open, transparent, flexible system of learning\(^4\). Being learner centered, they are also critical in use of alternative pathways for continuous learning, for assessing prior learning and employability. The learning outcomes based approach is not without its problems. The whole process is not trivial, and requires substantial investments in time, professional development, collaboration and sharing. Institutions that have not adopted this approach may be reluctant to change, and make the necessary investment. If not implemented through developing consensus, and accompanied by reliable methods of assessing learning outcomes, the approach is unlikely to be successful. Also, this approach is not without its critics. The most common complaint is that this approach might inhibit innovation and creativity, and impinge on institutional autonomy. These are, however not substantiated, and remain basically anxieties and fears. In fact, many reputable institutions in Australia, England, United States and Europe are already using this approach as part of their teaching and learning practices. The approach has also been incorporated in ENQA Standards and Guidelines\(^5\).

6) Benefits of learning outcomes based approach

i) For Learners, it helps in establishing clear expectations regarding expected learning and assessment. The learners can better plan their learning strategies and plans. If the qualification documents mention clear learning outcomes achieved, it is likely to have greater credibility internationally because of its greater transparency and links to quality standards.

ii) For Higher education institutes, it will mean two things. Firstly, a greater coherence in the design of their academic programs which in turn have greater credibility nationally and internationally because it would be linked to national and international quality standards and reference points. Secondly, it would permit them to ‘give credit where it is due’ and promote transparent and fair admission and credit transfer policies and procedures. It also presents a great opportunity for change.

iii) For employers, the documents would provide more readable and comparable list of competencies and skills associated with the qualifications.

iv) For Quality Assurance agencies and networks, the benefits of using this approach would be a) greater transparency; b) clear links between course/modules, programs, institutional goals, mission and purpose and c) reference points for audits, comparison and continuous quality improvement initiatives and recommendations.

\(^4\) Background paper, Stephen Adam, UK Bologna seminar on learning outcomes, Edinburgh 2004

7) Implication for proposed recognition tools

The European Credit Transfer Systems (ECTS) and the Diploma Supplement, two important tools for recognition used within Europe are proposed to be modified to reflect the learning outcomes based approach. Any new tool developed for this purpose would therefore have to include learning outcomes as essential part of the qualification documents.

C) ROLE OF EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCIES

The issue of agreements on quality standards and definitions, and agreed objectives and procedures for external quality assurance is closely tied to the recognition process. Since there may be gaps between the espoused values, principles and objectives, and actual performance and achievements, external quality assurance agencies have an important role to play in this process. This role has the following elements.

1. Facilitating the development of a well defined and well articulated framework of qualifications based on learning outcomes. This involves
   a. Development of educational programs with well defined program learning outcomes
   b. Mapping of a logical sequence of courses, with well defined objectives and course level learning outcomes
   c. Development of assessment methods for measuring achievements
2. Using the learning outcomes based approach described in 1 above as a ‘guide’ and ‘best practice’ for defining quality standards for institutions and programs and for promoting international credibility and transparency.
3. Facilitating organizational change, staff development and leadership development processes in higher education institutions to implement these processes through funds and initiatives, directly or indirectly.

On surface, this may appear to be a prescriptive and interventionist strategy. However, as agencies involved in international quality assurance and recognition will testify, institutions, nations, and regions with international recognition high on their agenda, have few other options at this stage to address the global challenges associated with reforms in higher education in general, and recognition in particular. European Higher Education Area framework could serve as a good example.
D) CONCLUSIONS

The challenges faced by international recognition of higher education are of two kinds. Firstly, the learners need to be assured that they will have all the required information about their acquired/proposed learning available to them when it is needed. Secondly, it is suggested that qualification, degrees, and programs be described and defined in a form that will lead to a transparent and fair process of international recognition. The challenges can be addressed by promoting empowerment of learners, and through using an ‘outcomes based approach’. The empowerment of learners is a quality of service issue which enables availability of information efficiently. The outcome based approach focuses on learning outcomes associated with the courses and programs. NARIC and ENIC have acknowledged that learning outcomes, which describe what a person knows and is able to do, are critical to the development of a sound, fair, efficient and transparent recognition process. Consequently, the specific courses and programs, or the processes become secondary to the comparison. What is of primary importance is the comparability of the achieved learning outcomes. This comparison can identify achievements and quantify gaps. The outcomes from this process can therefore be used by educational providers, credential verification agencies and employers for their specific requirements regarding what the holder of a particular qualification represents in terms of learning. Development and articulation of clear learning outcomes at all levels of qualifications is therefore an important responsibility of institutions that are concerned about recognition.

There are further challenges in addressing the gaps between the stated learning outcomes and their actual achievement and measurement. This is an issue of quality that follows and builds on completing the first step of articulating course and program objectives successfully. External Quality Assurance agencies are an important link in this chain. They have a crucial role in the future development of the recognition process through developing clear standards which can serve as reference points, both for the service quality in the availability of quality information and for ensuring academic coherence. The European Higher Education Area framework of qualification and recognition could serve as a useful model for this purpose.

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6 Adopted by the ENIC and NARIC Networks at their annual joint meeting, Strasbourg, 8 June 2004
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>International Quality Assurance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td><em>Identifying Threats and Maximizing benefits of Transnational Education</em></td>
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<td>Presenter</td>
<td>Theresa Okafor BA.Ed; M.Ed (University of Lagos); PhD Researcher (University of Nottingham)</td>
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</table>

*Abstract*

The growing demand for higher education and the inability of the private sector to satisfy this demand together with the challenges of market economy, ICT and privatization has fuelled the growth of transnational education. Transnational Education impacts on higher education in far-reaching and significant ways. Whilst it improves access, widens choice and promotes flexibility and internationalization of education, there are foreseeable threats that border on recognition, cultural autonomy, competitiveness and transparency. This paper examines the multi-level challenges of transnational education to existing higher education provision and proposes ways existing national (and emerging international) quality assurance systems can develop effective means to regulate, assure quality, protect learners in the context of GATS and eradicate ‘degree mills’/bogus institutions, malpractice and fraud.
Transnational Education Defined

An area where the impact of globalisation is strongly felt is in the growth of transnational education. Relatively a new phenomenon, trans-national education is closely linked to cross-border or borderless education. Its usage is becoming widespread but there are still confusions about its definition and so a range of different definitions will be examined for clarity.

The Global Alliance for Trans-national Education defined trans-national education as an export product: ‘Trans-national Education denotes any teaching or learning activity in which students are in a different country (host country) to that in which the institution providing the education is based (the home country)’. This situation requires that national boundaries be crossed by information about the education, and by staff and or educational materials (GATE, 1997, p. 1). McBurnie and Pollock (1998) noted that there are a variety of ways by which education is conducted trans-nationally, including via: distance education (with or without local support); twinning programmes; articulation programmes; branch campuses; and franchising arrangements. The definition of Transnational Education that has come to gain a wider acceptance is that provided by UNESCO/Council of Europe Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education (2001). According to the Code, ‘Transnational Education comprises “all types of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based”. The Code further explained that such programmes may belong to the educational system of a country different from the one in which they are offered or may be offered independently of any national system.

Challenges of Transnational Education

There are various levels of concerns about the threats posed by Transnational Education thus accounting for the resistance put up in some countries. The first is that it widens exclusivity because host countries often operate on a profit basis only and therefore recipients are treated as economic units rather than consumers. (An interpretation of the term consumer includes students, employers, the education community and the general major education stakeholders in public). When education operates on a commercial basis only it becomes the privilege of a few and the issue of affordability and marginalization arises. The poor become further impoverished as they cannot afford transnational education and so the problem of widening access which transnational education is meant to provide for becomes more of an ideal than a reality.

The various new forms of transnational education also challenges conventional assumptions about the quality of the student experience. When providers are not made accountable, the likelihood is that qualifications issued may not necessarily be recognised. Providers who remain outside national accreditation monitoring and quality assurance systems evaluation are oftentimes not subject to internal and external
audit/monitoring processes which strictly regulated national institutions are subjected to. Even where control exists, quality assurance mechanism are so loosely set up that the fact an education provider is part of a nationally recognized framework does not guarantee its quality as it may not have been subjected to the same rigour of acknowledged quality assurance agencies. Another angle to the quality of students experience has to do with when transnational education is delivered by local staff using a local language distinct from that of the home institution - Can the qualifications awarded be equivalent to that of the home institutions?

There are also issues of cultural sensitivities to local requirements and adequacy of physical, administrative, communication and other resources necessary to support learning. Where foreign providers exist independent of national institution an unfair competition may be posed to the latter thus leading to loss of income to home institutions and invariably increasing the gap between developed and developing countries.

Recognition problems may also arise if nationals consider TNE qualifications as ‘foreign’ because of difficulties arising from translating qualifications into national equivalents. Other recognition problem may arise from TNE being considered as easy evidenced by the fact that some providers shorten the course period, reduce the entry qualifications and do not provide the same level of support as they do to home students. At times students undergoing in trans-national education programmes may not be considered eligible for bursaries and other financial/education benefits accorded to those in home institutions.

Lenn 2000 identified ‘custom regulation’, ‘communication regulations’, ‘immigration regulations’ ‘foreign currency controls’ and ‘intellectual property concerns’ as some mitigating factors affecting quality in trans-national education. Custom regulations limit the transfer of educational training materials and most affected are medical and health related courses. Use of satellites are also inhibited by either power interruptions, unavailability or high costs on the one hand and on the other may be due to restricting telecommunications laws. Entry visas do restrict movement of resource persons and exchange students. Foreign exchange may be limited or restricted due to equity ceilings placed on direct investment on foreign providers and countries which disregard data protection laws dissuade providers from exporting certain instructional materials. Lenns assertion may have been influenced by the disclosure made by the Global Alliance for Transnational Education (Gate) in 1999 about the barriers to Transnational education. These barriers include:

- National legislation in general and in relation to higher education policies in particular
- Qualification authorities and their policies
- Custom regulations
- Visa regulations
- Telecommunications’ laws
- Intellectual property rights
- Bureaucratic rights
- Bureaucratic over-regulation by quality and funding agencies.
The main positive impacts of transnational education are the fact that it widens educational opportunities by providing more choice for citizens. It also challenges national systems to become more robust and dynamic given the competition it poses. National institutions are more likely to benefit from links with prestigious institutions and this is more likely to modernize national education provisions. Transnational education also has an economic benefit, it accrues significant income to the sending countries. More so it is likely to stem the brain drain phenomenon as nationals do not need to relocate from their place of abode to pursue a virtual programme.

**Institutionalizing Quality Assurance of Transnational Education**

Effort needs to be stepped up to maximize the benefits and minimize the threats of transnational education. It important to have national mechanisms which have the capacity to address accreditation and quality assessment procedures for the academic programs of new private and foreign providers, it is equally important that attention be given to developing an international approach to quality assurance and accreditation. The total quality assurance of transnational education should involve all the relevant actors including the creators, importers, exporters and consumers. According to The UK ‘Borderless Education’ project, ‘the main elements of a quality framework for borderless education should include: currency and security of qualifications; audit of the system for the design and approval of curricula or appropriate learning contracts; an internationally recognised system of educational audit; licensing of staff; security of assessment; an internationally-recognised approach to recording and certifying attainment; adequate public information about learning opportunities; approved guidance and complaints systems for learners; transparent quality management processes for each agent in the educational supply chain; access to learning resources assured by the provider; and publication of guidance relevant to different modes of provision.’

All educational stakeholders particularly national authorities should see it as a responsibility to protect the title ‘university’ and its degree awarding powers so that degree mills and bogus institutions are frustrated. A pre-condition before a student registers for a programme should be access to accurate and detailed information on the programme (content, level, teaching methods, outcomes/skills, recognition, support mechanism etc as well as information on the status, quality, accreditation and standards of the proposed institution. Countries should also adopt and implement the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Transnational Education as well as apply all the provisions of the Lisbon Convention to transnational education.
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Abstract

Athabasca University is the first university in Canada to receive accreditation from one of the six regional accreditation boards in the United States. This case study reviews the challenges and rewards of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) accreditation process for a wholly distance university. The overview of the steps in the application process from candidacy, through self study and visiting team report, and the discussion of the MSCHE accreditation standards will highlight some of the challenges with their application for trans-national delivery of online programs. The case study allows specific contrast between peer based reviews, state regulatory requirements and consumer education definitions of quality and addresses larger questions of reciprocity in multi-national accreditation standards.
Achieving Multi-National Accreditation for Canada's Open University

Athabasca University is the first university in Canada to receive accreditation from one of the six regional accreditation boards in the United States. This case study reviews the challenges and rewards of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) accreditation process for a wholly distance university. After an overview of the steps in the application process from candidacy, through the design and development of the self-study and the final visiting team report, the discussion of the MSCHE accreditation standards will highlight some of the challenges with their application for trans-national delivery of online programs. This case study then draws contrasts between peer based reviews, state regulatory requirements and consumer education definitions of quality and explores questions of recognized standards for trans-national delivery.

Since a great deal of diversity can be masked by common terms, any discussion of accreditation processes must by necessity begin with some definitional clarifications. Outside of the United States, accreditation is most often represented as the legal provisions by which a post-secondary institution offers a particular credential (Billing, 2004). In the United States the “practice of accreditation” is meant to ensure a “basic level of quality” through “non-governmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs” (USDoE, 2007). The term accreditation thus represents different, and differently problematic, poles. Legislative regimes favouring more direct state involvement in evaluating institutions and/or programs have been depicted as running counter to the autonomous impulses intrinsic to the pursuit of subject based knowledge (Brennan & Shah, 2000). On the other side, peer evaluation has been depicted as a minimalist exercise for institutions (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002) and potentially stifling for programmatic development (McKee, Mills, & Weatherbee, 2005, p. 297). For institutions with international interests being approved by a local agency does not provide unequivocal recognition for extra-territorial operations, and depending on the local licensing climate it may not even represent minimum quality assurance practices. Arguably, for both consumer protection and marketing position, jurisdictions with centrally controlled quality audits for the use of the term university and/or for levels of degrees or awards like England and Australia have an advantage in cross-border delivery (Vidovich, 2001). In the absence of a clearly articulated system to aid the legitimization of extra-territorial activities, other strategies have to be sought.

Athabasca University

In 1970 the province of Alberta established its fourth public university. Although Athabasca University was originally conceived as a primarily undergraduate residential institution, it rapidly evolved into a model for serving non-traditional students through open and distance delivery. This special mandate was established in 1974 and the extension to allow for masters level programs was confirmed twenty years later. In 1999, the Alberta government formally recognize Athabasca University’s role nationally and internationally within its mandate and letter of understanding. The pursuit of American accreditation for the university was part of the continuing evolution of an aggressive domestic growth strategy and a systematic emphasis on strategic international partnerships.

As an open university delivering largely self-paced undergraduate courses at a distance, the need to amortize course development costs over increased numbers of students was first articulated in Athabasca’s Strategic Planning Documents from 1996. Increasing the number of
students registering in individual courses was the key strategy to ameliorate the funding shortfalls caused by drastic reductions in government grants to the institution. This remained a priority in the 1999 update to the Strategic University Plan with the additional focus on “the U.S.A. as one service area in which students receive the same quality and level of service,” where fee differentials might contribute to “the resources available to finance courses and programs for residents of Alberta and Canada.” The international strategy developed included expanding a delivery model “in which AU provides course materials and assessment of students while the partner is responsible both for on-site teaching/tutoring and for local administrative arrangements.” Select partnership and positioning activities in the United States, like membership with the Western Governors University, and in seeking accreditation with one of the six regional boards, were also key to an international positioning strategy meant to enhance domestic growth. Subsequent to the articulation of this strategy the university reviewed the processes for accreditation by each of the six regions and determined that Middle States offered a viable application system for international institutions and a welcoming group of peer institutions for an institution with a mission to reduce barriers to access to university level studies.

The need for additional accreditation arose from the challenges growing with increasing numbers of international providers marketing directly to Canadian students and the less than transparent quality assurance systems which allowed a proliferation of private and for-profit enterprises. Some Canadian institutions have sought to position themselves through international rankings but very few have established name recognition outside of the country’s borders (Lang, 2005). Since education is constitutionally a provincial matter in Canada there is no standard regulation of post-secondary institutions, or even inter-provincial recognition of quality assurance processes and approvals.

Quality Assurance Systems in Canada

Like Alberta’s other public universities Athabasca has its authority to grant degrees through provincial legislation and regulation. Each board governed, public university has their scope defined through provincially approved mandate statements, complies with extensive performance reporting, and is subject to external financial audits. Formerly, individual program proposals were reviewed and approved by officials within the Ministry of Advanced Education but since passage of the Post Secondary Learning Act in 2004 the Campus Alberta Quality Council has the responsibility for reviewing new programs. An expedited review is available for established post-secondary institutions but applications for the first programs at a new level of credential are subject to more extensive institutional reviews (CAQC, 2007).

Membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) along with recognition within provincial legislation has often been considered as equivalent to national accreditation but it is important to note that “Canada does not have a system of institutional accreditation.” (AUCC, 2006) The regulations for private and out-of-province providers vary by territory. Additionally some professional programs are subject to separate provincial or professional regulatory bodies and/or quality assurance processes. Quality within the country is closely associated with ownership status, public vs. private, with clear reputation advantages for the public system. The relatively closed degree granting system has been challenged by private (both faith based and for-profit) institutions and non-research based (colleges and technical institutes) being given the right to award bachelor degrees (Marshall, 2004).

Multi-National Accreditation
While there are an increasing number of provincial quality assurance boards, they are a relatively recent development. Indeed, in January 2006, Athabasca University became the first out-of-province public institution to be recognized as a university with exempt status (which allows for expedited review of new programs) in the province of British Columbia (BCDQAB, 2007). The degree to which an established public university can be expected to be self-accrediting for additional programs within the level established by its provincial mandate (expedited review) or are subject to more direct oversight is not fully settled. Under Ontario regulation any newly constituted university, or institutions “not empowered to offer degree programs by an Ontario statute” must access the mechanisms of the Post Secondary Education Quality Board (PEQAB) to gain Ministerial consent to offer programs. Considerable public resources need to be invested for any new institution or for full operations of an out-of-province provider as each program application is assessed a $5,000 fee along with direct review costs ranging between $5,000 and $15,000 (PEQAB, 2007). The varying approaches to quality assurance are challenging within the country, and all the more obscure outside its borders.

Although it has been under attack recently, the process of accreditation by various regional boards in the United States proffers the advantages of having well articulated standards and processes and a history of accommodating a range of diverse institutional missions, mandates, and regulatory regimes. Through a national association there is also reciprocal recognition of accreditation standing by any one of the six regional boards.

The steps in accreditation by the Middle States Commission involved a base eligibility assessment, an application for candidacy, an institutional self-study an evaluation by a visiting team from peer institutions, and final review by the commission. For first time applicants the process of self-study and visiting team review is repeated after five years. Member institutions with a longer standing in the Association have periodic reviews at the five year, and full self-study and team visit at the ten year mark. The standards, processes, and record of the commission actions are all available to the public.

Application for Candidacy

As a public institution with thirty years of experience in the delivery of university level courses, programs and student support services at a distance, Athabasca University found most of the eligibility criteria and the application for candidacy a relatively straight forward exercise. Negotiating whether an offshore provider would be considered eligible by any of the regional boards was less so. Having a strategic intent and a track record of service to a small number of students (between 300 and 500 annually) in the United States were important considerations. It should be noted, however, that Athabasca University’s application, along with the U.S. branch of the British Open University were only accepted on a pilot basis by the Middle States Commission ("International Pilot," 2002). The dialogue for consideration began long before the first visit to Athabasca University by a Commission staff member. There was more than one year between the Governing Council passing the motion to seek U.S. accreditation in June 2000 to the pre-application submission. The pre-application was followed by the development of an application for candidacy in March 2002 with a subsequent visit from a team representing peer institutions.

In order to be eligible for candidacy the institutions has to demonstrate that it meets the twenty-two requirements. The first of those requirements is that the institution is “authorized to operate as an educational institution and award postsecondary degrees by an appropriate Multi-National Accreditation
governmental agency.” The other requirements range from having an appropriate governing structure, clear mission, and a secure financial base, to having degree programs “congruent with the institution’s mission”; which have “defined and published objectives” based on recognized fields of study and “conducted at appropriate levels of quality and rigor to the degrees offered.” (MSCHE, 2002a) Once having demonstrated that Athabasca University had met these requirements the institution was invited to begin the self study process. The duration of the candidacy period can be up to five years for some institutions but this was expedited for Athabasca University.

Designing and Completing the Institutional Self Study

Commission documentation suggests that a full academic year is the normal minimum working time needed to complete a self study but that preparation should begin at least four semesters before the expected date of the evaluation visit (MSCHE, 2002b). Although the period of Candidacy was expedited under the revised Middle States process, the planning and design of the self study took considerable effort.

The first step in designing the self study was identifying the lead participants and the potential steering committee members. The scope of the self-study was then discussed in a general way with representatives of the governing board, administration and faculty. The Steering Committee reviewed the standards and developed lists of nominees to serve on various task forces. The task forces worked from the standards to develop charge questions that would guide their section of the self-study. At the same time the task force memberships were being confirmed the institutional research office identified and assembled relevant background documentation for posting to the project’s website. Task forces were then able to review the questions and existing materials together to establish if there was a need to commission additional studies.

The charge questions were aimed at moving the self study away from a descriptive inventory (as might be covered by the eligibility documentation) to an analytic framework. For example, for the standard related to institutional resources a key charge question was “How well does the budget process align with the institution’s mission, goals, and strategic plan on an annual and multi-year basis?” --Or more simply-- “What does the allocation of our resources among programs and units say about our institutional priorities?”

The self-study design mapped out a general time frame for consultations, drafting, and review of the self study. It became rapidly apparent that the external requirements for accreditation, while important, were not the greatest potential benefit of the institutional engagement with such questions. The chance to reflect on the planning and assessment processes of the institution was significant. Debates on the meaning of an Open University mission embracing a commitment to excellence in teaching, service and research, informed the reactions to changes in the institution’s governing structure under the Post-Secondary Learning Act of 2004. The self-study process also allowed the opportunity to take stock of the process of moving from a primarily print based, asynchronous delivery model, to interactive on line course materials.

Multi-National Accreditation
Effectiveness and Outcomes

The MSCHE standards for accreditation are divided into two groups. The first seven focus on the institutional contexts of mission, planning, resources, governance, administration, integrity and institutional assessment. A fundamental element for institutional effectiveness is a written assessment plan which maps how assessment results are used to improve and gain efficiencies in administrative services and processes. It is conceptually useful to think of the standard related to assessment as the logical conclusion to the institutional contexts section. Being able to demonstrate how, through annual and episodic planning and renewal processes, Athabasca University was “closing the assessment loop” was more a case of documentation than having to initiate additional activities. The subsequent use of the self-study recommendations in the most recent round of strategic university planning is one indicator of a robust culture of reflective practice.

The MSCHE standards for educational effectiveness include: student admissions, student support services, faculty, educational offerings, general education, related educational activities, and assessment of student learning. The standard on related educational activities usually encompasses preparatory and non-credit offerings, branch campuses and other instructional sites, contracted or affiliated providers, and distance or distributed learning. As a fully distance and online institution Athabasca University represented paced classroom activities at partner institutions as its related educational activities. The lens of a normalized fully supported distance delivery university was feasible within the structure of the standards focusing on student learning and of the strong peer group within the region. With representatives from the University of Maryland – University College, Excelsior in College in New York, and Empire State College in the SUNY system, the strengths and challenges of open and distance learning could be weighed openly.

All too often distance delivery is thrust into a defensive position. If the best that can be claimed is that there is “no significant difference” in the learning experiences of post-secondary students learning at a distance (Russell, 1999), the advantages of flexibility and access have to be weighed against the considerable costs of entry for a fully supported distributed learning environment (Phipps & Merisotis, 2000). Proof of quality is demanded of distance providers in ways that often outstrip conventional classroom expectations. Special attention has been paid to the accreditation of distance education providers within the United States. This has included the development of codes of good practice and more recently a special review by the U.S. Department of Education (USDoE, 2006). As an exemplar of best practices in adult-friendly education and online student services Athabasca University was heartened by the visiting team report which commended the Student’s Union for their active engagement. The dialogue with our provincial regulators along with the opportunities for various provincial representatives to meet the visiting evaluation team sent by MSCHE provided an opportunity to reinforce the importance of Athabasca University in the provision of high quality learning opportunities in the public system of Alberta.

The requirements for annual profile submissions are one element of ongoing oversight by MSCHE. The other is the requirement to make a “substantive change” application when undertaking the first programs offered at a degree level different than in the institution’s initial accreditation (for example the first doctorate programs for a masters level institution) or offering more than half of a degree program at an international campus with both types of activities subject to onsite review by a visiting team. These interim reviews are focused on the Multi-National Accreditation
institutional capacity to support initiatives that were outside of the scope of the initial accreditation. It is with its structure of periodic peer review that regional accreditation has been caste as the “gold standard” in quality assurance activities (Aumann, 2006). In a best case scenario, the peer based review reinforces a commitment to ongoing improvement as expressed through a language of research and reflection.

Quality Assurance Regimes and Protectionist Impulses

It is important to note that accreditation by one of the six regional boards is not sufficient to establish operations or access to loan programs run by the U.S. Department of Education. There are specific provisions which would allow students to access federal funding while attending non-American institutions. Individual state regulations vary widely but in a number of cases regional accreditation is required before an institution can establish a physical presence but the definition of what constitutes a physical presence is not uniform (Goldstien, Lacey, & Janiga, 2006). Presumably, inter-state commerce provisions might be called into play by an American provider but the myriad of regulations and agencies involved and the associated costs can constitute significant barriers to trade in educational services. While some may suggest the accreditation and licensing process are designed to protect consumers from unscrupulous operators, the size of the U.S. Diploma Mill industry and the activities of accreditors seeking internationally based clients raise questions about the interests being served by the current regime. Notably, within a year of when Athabasca University received its accreditation from the MSCHE, budgetary amendments regarding student aid in the US were introduced as follows (emphasis added):

Distance Education : Eligible Program- Section 481(b) (20 U.S.C. 1088(b)) is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraphs:

`(3) An otherwise eligible program that is offered in whole or in part through telecommunications is eligible for the purposes of this title if the program is offered by an institution, other than a foreign institution, that has been evaluated and determined (before or after the date of enactment of the Higher Education Reconciliation Act of 2005) to have the capability to effectively deliver distance education programs by an accrediting agency or association that--

`'(A) is recognized by the Secretary under subpart 2 of part H; and

`'(B) has evaluation of distance education Changes to the Higher Education Authorization Act.

Such a regulation runs against the spirit of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) national treatment rule (Article XVII: 1, 1994) meant level the field between national providers and member country suppliers in scheduled activities.

A predictable outcome of multiple layers of accreditation not only tips the balance within institutions to increasing the roles of administrative professionals (Rhoades & Sporn, 2002) it also is likely to determine the nature of the entrants to trans-national activities. First, it privileges investor supported enterprises since fronting the costs of market entry is an easier business case to make in a for-profit enterprise than in a public or non-profit institution. Second, it privileges larger institutions that are already positioned to realize cost efficiencies through high volumes of students (mega universities). That for-profit interests are predominant is not new to international education but underscoring the need for robust national systems for quality

Multi-National Accreditation
assurance (Daniel, Kanwar, & Uvalic-Trumbic, 2006) can sometimes appear to be rearguard actions in the face of the commodification of higher education and the structured promotion of private commercial interests. The GATS process, with its escalating expectations of liberalization to facilitate for-profit activities, challenges the “public good” understandings of state supported higher education delivery (Patterson, 2005).

Defining Quality: Peers, Processes and Regulations

The task of defining quality within a higher education environment is not at all simple. There is complex tension between external regulation and internal processes. Some of the contested terrain is reflected in a language that is more embedded in business or management fads than humanities based codes of expression (Birnbaum, 2000). In the eyes of some department leaders, quality assurance mechanisms can appear wholly non-collegiate impositions by external (state funding agencies) or even alien (administrative professionals) interests. These tensions can be magnified when inter-jurisdictional activities are under consideration with less than altruistic intensions. Like their institutional members, accrediting organizations have increasing moved into new markets. Although recent commentaries dispute the practice (Contreras, 2006), evidence from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) indicates that there international operations among U.S. accrediting is not new (CHEA, 2002).

The high water mark for inter-agency discussions appears to have been 2005. In that year four different higher educations associations developed a check list of good practices for cross border higher education which included: contributions to the public good; capacity building; relevance; accessibility; quality review; accountability; and transparency (IAU/AUCC/ACE/CHEA, 2005). The discussions which led to the joint UNESCO/OECD guidelines also came to fruition in 2005. One of the common points in these pronouncements is the caution that a diversity of accrediting frameworks has the potential to leave gaps. The current consequence is that the recognition of foreign credentials is problematic for many regions. It is also not uncommon that state mechanisms designed to assess access to a particular territory by a foreign provider is not able to accommodate trans-national distance delivery (King, 2006).

While the various high-level discussions are not legally binding, their persuasive force may encourage more cooperative measures. Few would dispute that the quest to protect “students and other stakeholders from low-quality provision and disreputable providers” demands an international framework (UNESCO/OECD, 2005, p. 3). However, in order for the regulatory burden not to become a barrier to sustaining operations which are a benefit to both sending and receiving jurisdictions more “international co-operation among national quality assurance and accreditation agencies in order to increase their mutual understanding” is needed (UNESCO/OECD, 2005, p. 6).

The discussions of international cooperation lay claim to addressing a full range of stakeholders but it is not clear about how prospective students and/or their sponsors of future employers can assess the legitimacy of different international operators. The information gap has been partially filled by published rankings. The input focus and methodological limitations of rankings have not diminished their public popularity (Usher & Savino, 2006). The commercial interests of the publishers of ranking tables do not necessarily coincide with markers of institutional quality (Pike, 2004). Placement in well distributed consumer guides reflects Multi-National Accreditation
marketing choices by institutions while an industry of “consumer seals” or quality process validations (like Baldrige or ISO9000) is slowly expanding into higher education.

Programmatic based accrediting groups have also identified opportunities for expansion. Most notably the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB) undertook concrete steps to expand its international reach and compete with the European Foundation for Management accreditation initiatives (McKee et al., 2005). In that light, extraterritorial programmatic accreditation activities are equally a product that may need more than presumptions about the wisdom of free markets.

Conclusion

The largest challenges do not necessarily rest with the regulatory community which presumably will continue to seek legitimization for passing judgments on institutions. With the neo-liberal impetus behind the widening of degree offerings and the weight of GATS it is tempting to draw sharp distinctions between the for-profit and public sector providers. Despite the high profile of the University of Phoenix and the questions raised about standards of service and incentive based recruitment practices (Dillon, 2007), they are not a typical for-profit operation (Kinser, 2006). As the cases of Toronto’s Polytechnic Institute (Fenion, 2006) and Kingston College in British Columbia demonstrate, smaller enterprises can have wide impact on the reputation of any regulatory regime (Schmidt, 2007). The combination of the warnings issued but the Chinese consulate (Steffenhagen, 2007) and the placement of “out-of-province” providers in the same category as private providers under the British Columbia regulations has potential consequences for Athabasca University.

Within the paradigms of the academic world reputation is built through a community understanding which informally ranks established journals and scholars. In reality, the principles of peer review are best realized within a relatively closed system. The practice of peer review for institutional accreditation was similarly founded on a closed (geographically circumscribed) system. Common values expressed through a shared language of expectation are presumed to resonate. In the dynamic world of web-based delivery systems it is not clear that this paradigm can hold (King, 2006). In such an environment having achieved accreditation through a clearly defined process is a strategic asset.

Notes
1. This is one possible conclusion from the “Sokal Hoax” and its later manifestation in physics journals.

Multi-National Accreditation
References

Multi-National Accreditation


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**Abstract:**

Regional networks of quality assurance agencies are a relatively new phenomenon which have evolved with the economic/political regionalism of the last two decades. There are at least 16 regional networks representing virtually all geographical areas and over 100 countries, but the overwhelming majority of these have been established since the year 2000. Their purposes are generally common: to build capacity in quality assurance in higher education, but some have been founded for very specific purposes with limited timelines; others for very small geographical areas and still others as membership associations or recognition bodies. The dual evolution from a focus on individual countries to groupings of countries; and from a single centralized membership organization (INQAAHE) to multiple decentralized membership organizations, present new opportunities and challenges for the future. This session will present an overview of this new regionalizing phenomenon; will focus on two new and very large networks (the Asia Pacific and the Iberoamerican) where the majority of the membership is composed of developing countries; will discuss the relationship of the networks to INQAAHE; and generally will consider issues of opportunity and challenge, including the current and prospective development grants to the networks from The World Bank.
Background

Most regional networks of quality assurance agencies have evolved with the economic/political regionalism of the last two decades. The first network was in Central and Eastern Europe with its roots in the World Bank-UNESCO Higher Education Project administered from Romania in the early 1990s and which has since enjoyed coordinating leadership provided by the Hungarian Accreditation Council. The primary purpose of this network was for professional development and capacity building at the national level. With the European Union came the establishment of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in 2000 with general purposes of harmonizing higher education in the trade bloc and specific purposes of considering educational quality matters related to mobility. Recognizing that there are a number of ways in which networks can be categorized, there are currently 16 regional networks which can be put into the following general categories:

**Category 1:** Seven regional networks have been established since 2004 in which the overwhelming majority of their membership is comprised of developing countries. These include:

- Asia Pacific Quality Network
- Iberoamerican Quality Network (RIACES)
- The Association of African Universities’ Quality Assurance Project
- Arab States Quality Assurance Network
- Central and Eastern Europe Network
- Eurasian Education Quality Assurance Network
- Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE)

Additional information on these networks is found at the Appendix.

**Category 2:** Regional networks derived from official trade blocs:

- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

**Category 3:** Networks for small geographical regions:

- Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education

**Category 4:** There are also associations located within one country which act as regional networks but are not called that explicitly, for example:

Canada:

- Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada (AAAC for professional bodies)

United States:

- Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA)
- Council of Regional Institutional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC)
Australia
Professions Australia: Association of professional accreditors
Higher Education Recognition Officers (HEROs): Association of state
accrediting agencies

Germany
Akkreditierungsrat (AR): Recognises and relates the accrediting agencies in
Germany

The regional networks have different histories and have different characteristics. Some are
based on socio-economic groupings while a common language is a binding factor in other
cases. In contrast some are based solely on geography. But what they all share is a desire to
improve the capacity for quality assurance in higher education and by so doing help enhance
the contribution that higher education makes to society. Even among the new networks, each
has served their members by informing each other of the practice of neighboring countries:
creating a central website; sponsoring professional development gatherings; creating bi or
multi-lateral mutual recognition agreements and, for some, creating regional public policy for
the purposes of improving higher education outcomes (United States, Europe and the
Caribbean as examples). On a more specific level a good number of common themes are
emerging among the networks such the need to help develop workshops and other learning
opportunities for those engaged in academic review and concerns about how best to approach
the quality assurance of distance learning and other forms of transnational education.

INQAAHE has played a very important role in the development of the regional networks and
the contacts between it and the regional network remain strong. There is a strong overlap
between the board members of INQAAHE and the officers of the regional networks. At all
INQAAHE conferences and members’ workshops the opportunity is taken for the regional
groups to meet with each other, and with the INQAAHE board, to discuss common issues.
Further, since its inception, INQAAHE has served developing countries with professional
development programs, special scholarship schemes and access to expert consultation.
However, it is with the introduction of the World Bank’s Development Grant Facility program
that at least three networks (Asia Pacific; Iberoamerican and Africa) have secured major 3 year
grants to support regional programming in capacity building in quality assurance. In this vein,
the two most experienced regional networks (Asia Pacific and Iberoamerican) have focused on
five areas which can be enhanced and made more efficient when coordinated: These include
the provision for: (1) an information clearinghouse; (2) regional and global training and
development programs; (3) regional and global consultation services; (4) staff exchange,
internships and other means of increasing individual professional development; and (5)
strengthening regional external reviewer pools. To date, these two networks can provide
concrete evidence of increased capacity in quality assurance among participating countries.

The dual evolution from a focus on individual countries to groupings of countries; and from a
single centralized membership organization (INQAAHE) to multiple decentralized
membership organizations, present new opportunities and challenges for the future. The
presenters look forward to dealing with this topic at a session during the biennial conference of
INQAAHE in Toronto.
Appendix

Category 1: Seven Regions in Which the Majority are Developing Countries

Note: DGF is the World Bank Development Grant


Secretariat: Australian Universities Quality Agency, Melbourne
DGF Ineligible Country Members: Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Macau, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan,

Iberoamerican Quality Network  [www.riaces.org]  (Annual DGF: $215,000)

Secretariat: Secretariat in Name: RIACES
Secretariat: CINDA, Santiago, Chile
DGF Eligible Country Members: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela
Regional Organizational Member: Consejo Centroamericano de Acreditacion, the accreditor of Central American accrediting bodies
DGF Ineligible Country Member: Spain

Africa (DGF awarded)
Secretariat: Currently being organized through the African Association of Universities (AAU) in Ghana
Countries: Sub-Saharan Africa

Arab States Quality Assurance Network*
Secretariat: Organizing Meeting 29-30 November, 2005, organized by the Council for Academic Accreditation, United Arab Emirates
Countries: Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Jordan, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Tunis, United Arab Emirates and Oman
* DGF eligibility to be determined

Central and Eastern European Network  [www.ceanetwork.hu]
Secretariat: Hungarian Accreditation Council, Budapest
DGF Eligible Country Members: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic and Slovenia
DGF Ineligible Country Members: Austria, Bavaria/Germany

Eurasian Education Quality Assurance Network  www.eaqan.org*
Secretariat: National Accreditation Agency, Russian Federation, Moscow
DGF Eligible Country Members: Azerbaijan, Byelorussia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Latvia, Moldova, Estonia, Ukraine, Russian Federation (additional members expected)
* Additional information at http://www.nica.ru/main.en.phtml in section on International Activity

**Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education***
Secretariat: The University Council of Jamaica
DGF Eligible Country Members: Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos
* English-speaking countries in the Caribbean

**Category 2: Regional networks derived from official trade blocs:**

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

**Category 3: Networks for small geographical regions:**

**Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education**
Secretariat: Rotates between the member countries.
Was established in Copenhagen in December 1992
Countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

**Category 4: There are also associations located within one country which act as regional networks but are not called that explicitly, for example:**

**Canada:**
Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada (AAAC for professional bodies)

**United States:**
Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA)
Council of Regional Institutional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC)

**Australia**
Professions Australia: Association of professional accreditors

HEROs: Association of state accrediting agencies

**Germany**
Akkreditierungsrat (AR): Recognises and relates the accrediting agencies in Germany
Abstract: Pharmacy practice, pharmacy education and quality assurance systems for education differ from country to country. While developments in practice and education are reducing this diversity, current differences (on a global scale) are still significant. In many countries, quality assurance systems for pharmacy education are well-developed; in other countries, they are still emerging. An international forum – operating under the auspices of the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) - has been established to facilitate information exchange, collaboration and cooperation in the area of quality assurance of pharmacy education, with the ultimate goal of promoting and advancing quality in education for the profession of pharmacy worldwide. The objectives, activities and major project of the forum (to develop a globally-applicable framework for quality assurance of pharmacy education) will be discussed in the presentation.
Since attending my first international pharmacy conference in Mexico as a student, my interest in developing international contacts and fostering global collaboration has grown progressively. In 1986, I joined the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) and primarily through my involvement with that organization have traveled to nearly fifty countries and met and interacted with pharmacists from at least twice that number. In 2001, I moved with my family to the United States and joined the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE). While my professional interests since then have focused more on the quality assurance of education – both professional and continuing – I have continued to be involved in broader professional issues.

While some core aspects of the profession of pharmacy may apply globally, it has been my experience that pharmacy practice, education, and the systems for quality assurance of pharmacy education (where they exist) differ from country to country. Over the past two to three decades, however, a global vision for pharmacy practice has begun to emerge; one in which pharmacists have a much expanded patient care role in the overall delivery of healthcare. As such, the pharmacy profession as a whole and pharmacy practice and education in particular are undergoing unprecedented change; the extent of which is probably not matched in the major health professions. While the diversity referred to earlier is diminishing as a result of endorsement of this new vision and role for pharmacists, it is still significant when considered on a global scale.

In essence, pharmacists are transitioning from a primarily product-focused role to a primarily patient-focused role, or in other terms pharmacists are now becoming recognized as the “medication use specialists.” In the slide, this transition is shown as progressing from “compounders” through “counters” to “carers.” Not only are countries - when considered as a whole - at different stages in this transition, but even within countries the practice of pharmacy may well differ from site to site and/or setting to setting (e.g., comparing community pharmacy practice and hospital practice). Due to the dynamic interplay between education and practice, pharmacy education globally is also undergoing major reform – sometimes practice leads education; at other times education drives change in practice.

National quality assurance systems for pharmacy education also differ. In some countries systems are well developed; in others they are still emerging. For many countries, this is a direct or indirect function and responsibility of government, although more independent and autonomous models are becoming more common. Probably most would agree that every country should have its own national system of quality assurance and standards for education that reflect contemporary pharmacy practice and education. These must be appropriate to the overall system of healthcare delivery and must meet the specific needs of the country. While recognizing the value of regional collaboration and some level of harmonization, a resolution adopted during the 2002 Pan American Conference on Pharmaceutical Education endorsed the concept of national standards.

The changing role of pharmacists and the expanded scope of pharmacy practice require a significantly different educational approach throughout the continuum of pharmacy education. Furthermore, it is unlikely that any country has found or developed the perfect
solution to the opportunities and challenges facing the profession in terms of education and training. We can all learn from others, and everyone/every country has something to offer through unique experiences and perspectives. Such international interaction and collaboration can occur at [at least] three levels:

- Individual to individual
- Institution to institution
- Nation to nation

When it comes to international collaboration, I could cite many cases where I have personally benefited; examples of how my organization (ACPE) has worked with specific institutions overseas; and example of initiatives to advance pharmacy education and quality assurance at a national level.

In 2001, ACPE recognized the opportunity that the annual conference of FIP provided by bringing together many people with an interest or involvement in the quality assurance of pharmacy education. A meeting was held in Singapore and this led to the establishment of what has become known as the *International Forum for Quality Assurance of Pharmacy Education*. The Forum now operates under the auspices of the Academic Section of FIP and its (informal) “membership” comprises approximately 260 people from close to 60 countries, regional and international organizations. Six international meetings have been held; these have involved a range of subjects and speakers from several countries. In 2004, the Forum’s meeting focused on issues of interest in the Pan American region and in 2005 on the Middle East region. The next meeting is scheduled for Beijing, China in September 2007. The first major project of the Forum is the development of a globally-applicable framework for quality assurance of pharmacy education, and this will be discussed in more detail later.

The objectives of the Forum are:

- To promote excellence in education for the profession of pharmacy;
- To provide an international forum for information exchange, collaboration and cooperation in the area of quality assurance of pharmacy education, both in terms of entry-to-practice degree programs, as well as continuing pharmacy education (CE) and continuing professional development (CPD);
- To facilitate and promote communication between individuals, agencies, associations, and other bodies actively involved in, or interested in, quality assurance of pharmacy education, with a view to:
  - the establishment of systems of quality assurance in countries where no such formal systems exist;
  - the continuous quality improvement of existing systems of quality assurance.

Some of the areas of collaboration and information exchange – both informally and formally through presentations and discussions at the international meetings – have included:
For the past few years, the efforts of the Forum have, however, focused on the development of a global framework for the quality of pharmacy education. How and why did such an idea come about? Through the focused discussions and exchange facilitated by the Forum, it was soon evident that while notable differences existed in pharmacy practice, pharmacy education, and the systems for quality assurance, it was unlikely that the principles and core elements for quality assurance of pharmacy education differed significantly, if at all, from country to country. Members of the Forum felt that it would be valuable to identify and compile these principles and core elements into a globally-applicable framework for quality assurance of pharmacy education. It was also felt that countries either trying to establish or trying to improve their system of quality assurance could benefit from such an internationally-developed and adopted framework. It was decided that the development of the framework was an appropriate project for the Forum to undertake.

The final product is intended as a “framework” or “template” that can be adapted and built-on to suit local needs and conditions. It will focus more on the elements that need to be included, and how these elements are applied in principle, rather than attempting to be too specific or detailed. Above all, the framework will avoid being prescriptive; it will not advocate for any particular model of quality assurance nor for any academic model, and will strive to exclude any cultural or systematic biases or nuances.

The major part of the framework will focus on the principles and core elements for quality assurance of professional degree programs in pharmacy using a standards-based or criteria-based approach. The principles will be addressed in three main areas: Outcomes, Structure, and Process. Outcomes will be covered first; reflecting the trend in the QA community to shift focus from evaluation of structure and process to assessment and evaluation of outcomes.

What is the potential future for the framework, its uptake and application? The first substantive draft of the framework was discussed at the 2006 Forum Meeting in Salvador Bahia, Brazil. It is proposed that the second draft will be reviewed by an international
panel, with a view to final adoption in Beijing in September 2007. The development of the framework is now on the agenda of FIP’s recently established Pharmacy Education Taskforce; a group that has formal participation by and endorsement of the WHO through its Human Resources for Health Department. The Taskforce is also seeking active collaboration with the Global Health Workforce Alliance. It is proposed that the framework will become an official FIP document (a companion piece to its Statement on Good Pharmacy Education Practice) and be translated and disseminated as widely as possible.

Follow-up activities may look at other aspects of pharmacy education and training such as continuing education (CE), continuing professional development (CPD), post-graduate and specialty credentials.

Why is the Forum not considering global standards for pharmacy education at this time, e.g., along the same lines as produced by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME)? Pharmacy practice and education are considered to be too diverse at this time for a global standard. This reflects the fact that national health needs and priorities, and the roles played by pharmacists in healthcare delivery are still significantly different. There would need to be much more convergence before a global standard could be considered, but it certainly has not been eliminated as a future possibility.

There is not sufficient time to go into the detail of the framework in this presentation. Furthermore, it is still a “work-in-progress” and, therefore, subject to change. I will briefly explain some of the major areas in the current draft of the framework; slightly more detail is provided in the handout.

The Introduction (Part 1) of the framework will discuss the global vision for pharmacy practice and education, but also stress that roles and competencies for pharmacists must be established that are appropriate to meet current and future needs of the country and its population and that the national vision for pharmacy practice and education must be developed through profession-wide consultation with input from all stakeholders. The philosophy and purpose of, and different systems for, quality assurance will be discussed.

The next major section (Part 2) of the framework will be devoted to a discussion of the structure and governance of the organization or body that is responsible for the quality assurance of pharmacy education, including such aspects as: how it is established, its terms of reference, its composition, professional and public input, and funding.

Part 3 of the framework will deal with operations, policies and procedures of the QA body. As can be seen from the slides and handout, this section is comprehensive but to stress again, the framework will strive to stick to principles, describing what needs to be done in order to have an effective system, without being prescriptive in terms of how it should be done.
Part 4 describes the areas that need to be covered by “standards” or “criteria for quality.” As mentioned earlier, these have been divided into three areas: Outcomes, Structure, and Process.

The “Outcomes” section (4.1) deals with the educational outcomes and competencies that should be achieved by graduates of the program, as well as with how the achievement of all programmatic (mission-related) outcomes will be evaluated. Specific educational outcomes and competencies will not be articulated; rather the framework will describe how such outcomes are appropriately established through profession-wide dialogue and with input from all stakeholders.

Section 4.2 deals with structural issues – what a school should have “in place.” Sub-sections deal with: Mission, Goals, and Values; Organization, Administration, and Leadership; Collaborative Relationships; The Curriculum; and Resources. In the next slide, the elements covered by “Resources” are listed in more detail, including human, financial, physical, library and educational resources.

Section 4.3 deals with process issues – still a vital area for quality. Aspects currently covered in this section are: Planning; Enrollment Management; Evaluation and Assessment; Academic Policies and Procedures; Student Services; Student and Alumni Representation and Input; Curricular Development and Improvement; Teaching and Learning Methodologies; Faculty, Staff, and Preceptor Development and Evaluation; and Research and Scholarly Activity.

The final section is a glossary of terms. Recognizing that many terms do not have the same interpretation or application in different countries, this section will [at least] attempt to describe how terms used within the document are applied, rather than to advocate for a specific definition of a term.

The International Forum for Quality Assurance of Pharmacy Education has, I believe, demonstrated that through a largely informal and unstructured mechanism, meaningful collaboration and information exchange can be facilitated and achieved. Furthermore, through the development of a globally-applicable framework for quality assurance of pharmacy education, members of the Forum are confident that they can contribute to the advancement of pharmacy education globally and, thereby, to the enhancement of healthcare delivery.

I thank you for your attention.
International Dimensions of Quality Assurance

Abstract

In general, quality assurance agencies are established to serve specific national contexts. The recent developments in the HE sector, in terms of increasing internationalisation, affect the national orientation of the QA agencies and require them to take up certain international elements as well. One can identify at least three dimensions to their international orientation. This paper addresses them as ‘three Ds’. D1 is related to the QA agency expanding its scope to cover the international activities of its own higher education sector – both import and export. D2 is related to the QA agency crossing its national borders to offer its QA service to HE sectors in other countries. D3 is related to the QA agency wishing to demonstrate its own quality against international criteria. Apart from these ‘national QA agency centric’ dimensions, there are also international quality assurance activities carried out by agencies that are not oriented to any specific national contexts but function primarily to offer QA services internationally. This paper discusses only the national agency centric dimensions with specific reference to the Asia-Pacific region and the role of the network of QA agencies in strengthening these developments.
In general, quality assurance agencies are established to serve specific national contexts. The recent developments in the HE sector, in terms of increasing internationalisation, affect the national orientation of the QA agencies and require them to take up certain international elements as well. One can identify at least three dimensions to their international orientation. This paper addresses them as ‘three Ds’. D1 is related to the QA agency expanding its scope to cover the international activities of its own higher education sector – both import and export. D2 is related to the QA agency crossing its national borders to offer its QA service to HE sectors in other countries. D3 is related to the QA agency wishing to demonstrate its own quality against international criteria. Apart from these ‘national QA agency centric’ dimensions, there are also international quality assurance activities carried out by agencies that are not oriented to any specific national contexts but function primarily to offer QA services internationally. This paper discusses only the national agency centric dimensions with specific reference to the Asia-Pacific region.

**D1: QA agency covers the international activities of its HE sector**

The most visible driver for the international dimension of QA is the internationalisation of HEIs. Developments in Information and Communication Technologies, new forms of education, new modes of delivery, blurring of geographical boundaries – all lead to an internationalised landscape of HE. To serve the HEIs effectively in this internationalised landscape, the quality assurance agencies also need to become international in their orientation, approach and scope.

There are two sides to ‘internationalisation’ of HEIs. HEIs may integrate an international / intercultural dimension into the teaching and research in their domestic campus and encourage international students and staff to join the domestic campus; that is called internationalisation at home. HEIs may cross borders to offer their services and that is internationalisation abroad. HEIs not only deliver their services abroad; they also engage in partnerships and bring in programs from other countries. Activities related to all these aspects of internationalisation are increasing rapidly and this requires that QA agencies also develop the capacity to cover this international engagement of their HEIs. This calls for expansion of the scope of QA.

There is also an added expectation to this. As HEIs work collaboratively with their counterparts across borders, it is but natural that they expect the quality assurance agencies to follow a similar approach and work collaboratively with QA agencies across borders. If QA agencies do not develop this capacity to cooperate with their counterparts, the serviceability of QA to HEIs and the effectiveness of QA services would be seriously limited. Here, the QA agency has to take responsibility not only for the international activities of its HEIs by expanding its scope but also be able to strengthen its own international engagement with QA agencies across borders, especially in countries where its HEIs have a major presence. Thus, it calls for a change in the approach of the QA agency.

In addition, increasingly, the governments may expect the national QA agency to look into the import of education whether through national HEIs or independent of them (such as ICT companies). Thus the QA agency may need to take the responsibility to quality assure both exports and imports that happen in its HE sector.
D2: QA agency offers QA services to international clientele

Similar to the HEIs offering their services across borders, some QA agencies extend their service to international clientele or HE sectors across borders. The volume of this activity is at a low base but is increasing due to three reasons.

One reason is the need for capacity development in QA in some countries coupled with the acknowledgement that QA is essential for strengthening the national HE sector. In the Asia-Pacific, Cambodia and Sri Lanka are examples where QA experience of other countries feeds into strengthening the emerging QA systems of these countries. Vietnam, which is in the process of auditing its universities by QA agencies of other countries as a part of a World Bank project, is yet another example.

The other reason is ‘the sustainability’ of having a dedicated QA system in situations such as the small island nations where the HE sector is relatively too small to require a separate QA system. It might be more practicable for these countries to approach another reliable QA agency (ies) for QA services. The on-going discussion on auditing University of South Pacific (USP), which covers 12 small island nations, by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU) is an example. USP has entered into a memorandum of agreement with AUQA and NZUAAU for its Quality Strategy which includes support for institutional preparations for the self-review, conduct of an external whole-of-institution quality audit and a report. A variant of this model is the audit of the University of Mauritius where the Quality Assurance Unit of the Tertiary Education Commission of Mauritius constituted an international panel drawing QA expertise from Australia, India and South Africa.

The third reason for increase in activities related to this dimension is the change and development in QA practices coupled with the realisation that some amount of convergence is also necessary in the various QA frameworks. Even the well established QA bodies are rethinking their strategies, experimenting on new approaches and they look for successful practices from elsewhere. Consequently, a lot of consultation is going on in the sector. For example, when the accrediting agencies of Philippines wanted to consider the lessons of experience of ‘whole-of-institution assessment’ as opposed to ‘programmatic assessment’ that they were doing, consultation with institutional accreditors of other countries was initiated. The QA system of Malaysia is in a major developmental restructuring as is the case of the Singapore Higher Education Accreditation Council (SHEAC) of Singapore. The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) has just launched its second cycle of audits with an emphasis on standards and outcomes and these new dimensions result in wider consultations across national borders. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India has involved QA staff from other countries to observe its processes and to give feedback. As the QA agencies bring in changes to their practices they also try to learn from the experiences of the others and ensure some level of comparability in their developments.

D3: QA agency demonstrates its quality against internationally accepted criteria

This gains significance when the QA agency wants to understand its own quality or wishes to be known as a reliable agency internationally or wishes to see where it stands in terms of internationally accepted good practices of QA. Here ‘quality of quality assurance’ or ‘comparability of QA processes against those of others’ gains an international dimension and the predominant way of doing this is for the agencies to undergo external reviews by international QA teams and/or against externally set QA criteria. In the Asia-Pacific, AUQA,
and NZUAAU have undergone this process. (Another paper from AUQA covers these developments).

As an indicator of quality of quality assurance, some agencies ensure international presence in the reviews they conduct and in their governance structure. With many regional initiatives for cooperation among quality assurance agencies coming to the forefront, ensuring international presence is seen as a healthy practice to promote international comparability and acceptance of the QA procedures. International presence also brings a new perspective to a country’s quality assurance processes and improves its professionalism.

International presence in review teams is increasingly common. AUQA (Australia), NZUAAU (New Zealand) and UGC (Hong Kong) follow this practice. Governing bodies of quality assurance agencies tend to have a favourable attitude towards it due to the growing importance of regional dialogue among the quality assurance agencies and internationalisation of HEIs. Compared to this element, international presence in the governance structure is less common. In the Asia-Pacific, the HKCAA of Hong Kong, the UGC of Hong Kong, NZUAAU of New Zealand and the NIAD-UE of Japan have international members serving on their boards. Over a quarter of the HKCAA Board membership is international. The international presence also depends on other factors such as the importance given to regional cooperation and the political will that supports regional cooperation such as in Europe by the move towards a European Higher Education Area. As the Asia-Pacific becomes more engaged in developing its regional higher education space, similar developments might be expected in the region.

This dimension of international engagement is still evolving and found only in some well developed systems. This is different from D2 where international presence in the QA practices of a country is predominantly from the ‘capacity development’ point of view and the QA agency has a ‘client’ status. On the other hand, D3 enhances international presence in the QA practices from the ‘collegial’ point of view and the QA agency contributes to the developing knowledge base on areas of common interest such as new approaches to QA. In this case, moving beyond serving the national context well, the QA body intentionally involves QA practitioners from other countries as peers. An incentive to do this may be to ensure its credibility and comparability at an internationally accepted / regarded level.

Overall, international engagement of QA agencies discussed above cuts across three dimensions and is manifested in different activities that include:

- QA agencies covering the international engagement of its domestic HEIs within its country
- QA agencies covering the international engagement of its HEIs in other countries
- QA agencies covering any other activity that comes into its HE sector from other countries
- QA agencies offering their QA expertise to the HE sector in other countries
- QA agencies proving their own quality and/or comparability against internationally accepted criteria or good practices
- QA agencies strengthening international presence in their reviews and governance

**Implications for QA Networks**

Strengthening all these three dimensions can happen through activities such as dissemination and promotion of good practices of quality assurance. The Guidelines of Good Practices of INQAAHE, UNESCO-OECD Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross Border Higher
Education, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, etc contribute to this. Supporting projects related to these themes, dissemination strategies on these aspects etc are areas where networks of QA agencies have a major role.

D1 namely ‘capacity to quality assure the international engagement of its HE sector’ is of significance to all QA agencies irrespective of the stage of development of the higher education sector and its QA capacity. In relation to strengthening this dimension, the QA networks will have to consider three major problems:

1. QA capacity to cover the international activities that happen in the HE sector is limited in many countries.
2. Countries that have the QA capacity have highly variable practices.
3. Dialogue and cooperation among QA agencies of predominantly ‘provider countries’ and predominantly ‘receiving countries’ is very weak.

**Capacity:** The expectation that national QA agencies be able to look at the internationalisation of the HE sector is emerging as an imperative for all QA agencies. The QA agencies that are oriented to the national contexts face challenges in meeting this expectation. Many surveys have repeatedly highlighted this. The UNESCO-OECD Guidelines and similar initiatives are educational responses to address this need. The survey conducted by the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) in 2004 by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), indicated that there is a need for capacity development in quality-related issues of CBE in the Asia-Pacific. Except a few countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong, the role of QA agencies in the quality assurance of CBHE was not well defined. Even in countries where mechanisms existed they were more like governmental regulations that treated education as any other trade and the role of QA was not clear. Another survey conducted by AUQA among the APEC economies indicated similar results. In 2007, the situation remains the same.

**Diversity:** Policies and practices of quality assurance in CBE vary even among countries of similar typology. For example, in the UK, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) from time to time convenes a panel to visit a group (sample) of overseas operations in one country or region. In Australia, the AUQA’s audits address the transnational operations of the university sector institution by institution. This gives a coherent approach to understand the QA arrangements of every Australian HEI irrespective of whether the operations are in Australia or overseas. It also leads to situations where the same overseas institution may be visited many times due to its partnership arrangements with more than one Australian HEI. The USA agencies carry out visits to any operation that is established more than 40 miles from the institution’s main campus but they mainly follow the accreditation approach whereas QAA and AUQA have the audit approach.

These three agencies accept the QA responsibility for the cross border offerings of their respective HEIs at varying levels and follow highly diverse approaches to exercise that responsibility. Although Asia-Pacific is the region where these three countries have very active presence in offering educational services, the QA agencies of these countries are yet to establish a cooperative arrangement. For example, in countries like Hong Kong, China, Malaysia and Singapore the same local institution may be partnering with different HEIs of these three countries and there is a good case
for cooperation among the QA agencies. But the diversity in practices has been a major bottleneck. Recently, there are also signs of interest in cooperation. AUQA and QAA are involved in discussions with members of the US regional accreditation community, to learn about and from each others’ systems. The discussions so far have revealed more diversities than similarities and perhaps a new approach is required for a successful cooperation. If there is such a variation among the three major exporters, one can understand how difficult it would be in other situations and perhaps a radical change in the approach to quality assurance has to be explored.

Dialogue and co-operation among QA agencies: HEIs of a country may have significant presence in another country but the QA agencies of these two countries may not be engaged in any meaningful dialogue in terms of informing each other of the quality problems in CBHE. Lack of capacity, diversity in practices and absence of a productive/constructive dialogue among QA agencies lead to mistrust and stereotypic understandings about the QA of CBHE. That perception is gradually changing in some countries due to the evidence that cross-border delivery of higher education can respond to human and social development needs, provide new opportunities, and increase the possibilities for improving workforce skills if managed appropriately. Teacher education programs offered in Africa, when there was shortage of trained teachers, with the support of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) through Open and Distance Learning (ODL), is an example and India had a major contribution to this. Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, China, Maldives and Indonesia are examples of countries that have benefited from cross-border educational services. Today, countries have realised that there are ways to protect the interests of both parties and they see cooperation as the best way to do that.

Although cross-border education can have significant advantages, it is also true that increasing instances of unscrupulous providers operating without appropriate approvals and providing low quality educational services are being reported. Hong Kong noted many such cases and to encourage good provisions but eliminate low-quality provisions Hong Kong has tightened its registration process for foreign providers. In spite of tight controls, low quality providers might still slip through the cracks if quality assurance agencies do not share information with each other about the low quality providers. This is a problem for both the sending and receiving countries. If higher education institutions of country X offer programs in 30 different countries, in spite of having a good national quality assurance strategy, it may not be possible for the quality assurance agency of country X to understand the major quality issues in 30 different countries. Cooperation becomes essential to deal with different national contexts. The communication network the quality assurance agency of Hong Kong maintains to ensure that fake degrees and fake providers are eliminated is a good example of reaching out to relevant agencies in the exporting countries.

It should also be noted that the exporting–importing divide is becoming very blurred. More and more countries are becoming exporters as well as importers. This makes the stereotypic assumption about the exporting-receiving countries - exporting countries intentionally offer low-quality provisions and the receiving countries are exploited by the revenue generation approach of exporting countries - invalid. Australia, traditionally known as an exporter is also an importer. Carnegie Mellon University of the USA has been invited by the South Australian Government to operate in Australia. Dubai campus of the Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS), Malaysian campus of the Manipal Academy for Higher Education (MAHE) and the operations of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in countries with substantial Indian Diasporas are typical examples of India becoming an exporter. Singapore and
Malaysia attract international students as well as foreign university campuses and aspire to become regional hubs for the Asian students. To develop a balanced quality assurance framework that would consider the dual roles of exporting-cum-importing countries, cooperation is essential.

If QA agencies do not strengthen their cooperation with each other, there is a danger of too much QA for CBE which in the long term might curb all innovation and creative learning models and promote a compliance culture. HEIs will have to undergo multiple QA regimes leading to ‘overload of QA’. Here again, the Asia-Pacific region has some good examples. AUQA, NAAC, NZUAU, HKCAA, and SEEI have entered into cooperation agreements with other QA agencies.

QA agencies realise that it is not possible to expect a uniform QA process to promote cooperation. The need to respect national contexts and diversity in QA practices has been accepted. The UNESCO-OECD Guidelines is a facilitator in strengthening this and the networks of QA agencies have a major role in promoting this. Again, there are good examples in the APQN.

**APQN and the three Ds**

APQN is a typical example of a regional network that has made a positive impact on its membership in all the three dimensions discussed in this paper. In response to the need for orienting the policy makers on the QA of CBHE, APQN worked with UNESCO-Bangkok and developed the ‘UNESCO/APQN Toolkit: Regulating the Quality of Cross-Border Education’. The toolkit complements the OECD/UNESCO Guidelines and is intended to act as an aid to regulating quality assurance for countries that are involved in providing and receiving cross-border education. It discusses a range of the issues involved and some of the approaches that have been used to address them. It was discussed in the APQN workshops and the APQN members have extended support to the guidelines. The toolkit is now in the second stage of developing more exemplar materials for the countries to choose from.

The discussions on Good Practices during the annual meeting of APQN held in February 2007 brought out some good practices the APQN members have been able to implement drawing from the Guidelines. APQN is also contemplating developing a Good Practice Database. The distance education course on QA by the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) has been extended to the APQN members in collaboration with IIEP and UNESCO-Bangkok. The course has a module that deals with CBHE and UNESCO-OECD Guidelines.

APQN has a good staff exchange program and consultancy services to strengthen the international engagement of QA agencies. It runs a project on Mutual Recognition and in fact, APQN has a Vision that by 2010 all APQN members will be able to recognise each other’s QA decisions. It is expected that such efforts will contribute to strengthening the national capacity for quality assurance of CBHE in the region and enhance international cooperation on those issues. Similar efforts are needed in other regions.

**What can INQAAHE do?**

This issue was partly raised, with respect to quality assurance of CBHE, in the INQAAHE 2006 workshop held at Hague. Most quality assurance agencies that participated in the workshop reported that their quality assurance arrangements are being expanded in scope to include cross-border education provision in its various modes. While some agencies had good models in place...
that were being implemented many others have realised the need to pay attention to CBHE and have started developing their procedures. Consequently, the participants recommended QA in CBE as a major area for capacity development and expected the networks of QA agencies to play an active role.

The participants agreed that regional and international networks of QA as platforms to exchange information, and disseminate knowledge are already well in place. However, the need to use the Networks more systematically to share good practices was voiced by many. Some felt that the role of INQAAHE to improve awareness of disreputable providers and dubious quality assurance bodies needs some reflection.

In particular, the following were considered as what INQAAHE and its Members can do:

- strengthen trust and confidence among INQAAHE membership on adhering to the UNESCO-OECD Guidelines;
- convince the policy makers on the merits of the Guidelines;
- build an international platform for information sharing, consultations and gradual mutual recognition in QA;
- consider mechanisms to take action against dubious advertisements/agencies;
- promote mutual agreements/arrangements among INQAAHE members especially to facilitate audit involving QA agencies across national borders;
- encourage joint audits;
- promote interchange of experts and consultants;
- strengthen sharing of information/best practices related to the implementation of the Guidelines;
- set up an INQAAHE discussion board for self reflection on the applicability and application of the Guidelines; and
- use the guidelines as a reference to launch capacity building programs on areas that need attention.

It should be noted that these recommendations indicate a significant role for INQAAHE in promoting all the three dimensions discussed in this paper.

**Conclusion**

There are at least three dimensions to the international engagement of QA agencies. These dimensions have significant implications for QA networks as they provide the platform for dissemination of new ideas and perspectives that trigger further developments in many countries. Instead of focussing on a few predominant developments based on a narrow understanding of internationalisation of QA, it is important that these platforms are used to discuss developments that may be less familiar at present but are likely to have far reaching constructive impact in the future. In particular, it should be noted that currently, there is a lot of attention to D1 but not much on D2 and D3. As countries strengthen their capacity in D1 it is important to incorporate practices that will promote D2 and D3. Developing this knowledge base through relevant projects and sharing of good practices has to be promoted by the QA networks.
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<td>Title</td>
<td><em>Internationalizing Higher Education Knowledge Content: Acknowledging a pedagogical Quality Assurance Discourse</em></td>
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| Presenter    | Lennart Svensson, Lund University  
Monne Wihlborg, Lund University, Sweden & Blekinge Institute of Technology |

**Abstract.**
Internationalisation of higher education is a current theme in research and politics of higher education. The theme in this paper is related to present developments and concerns of the growing border-crossing activities that take place between nations and their systems of Higher Education. Higher education is expected to be based on research, research to be an international activity, and the universities to have an international orientation also in their education of students. The dominant discourse on internationalisation of higher education in research and research based discussions have up till now mainly been from a political, an economic and an organisational perspective. There is also a tendency to place internationalisation within the frame of globalisation and the increasing trade in educational services worldwide. We do not dispute that this research is helpful to clarify some main political and economic conditions for and ways of organising higher education. However, the research does not give much basis for internationalising the teaching and learning and development of scholarship. There is an obvious risk of neglecting the meaning of the development of internationalisation in higher education when it comes to teaching and learning intercultural knowledge and competencies, and development of scholarship. There is a need of addressing questions about the internationalising of the content of education. Both at national and institutional levels, in many countries, internationalisation is stated to be an educational goal, sometimes discussed as a linear homogenization process, sometimes emphasising a pluralistic process, multilingualism and multiculturalism. In some previous studies we have found that the concretisation of internationalisation as an educational goal is very unclear. The concrete content considered to represent internationalisation seems to be rather haphazardly included in the teaching and learning. There is also a tendency to look at what is considered to be general knowledge and general human qualities as what represents internationalisation without considering cultural differences. In higher education there is no institutionalised educational and didactic thinking as a basis for developing internationalisation of the education. The concrete thinking is very much restricted to organisational and administrative aspects of the education. The thinking about educational content and learning outcomes is much idealised and not developed in terms of students’ competencies and capabilities (attitudes and approaches). In this paper we present and discuss the conditions for an educational didactic framework and approach to internationalisation of higher education.
Introduction

Internationalisation of higher education forms part of globalisation, which includes politically and market regulated flows of people, money, products and ideas. There is an increased integration of political and economic systems in the world (Waks, 2003). There is also a flow of political, economic and organisational ideas and models forming part of the globalisation. Those ideas represent a cultural flow and exchange between countries and parts of the world (Peters & Marshall, 1996). This flow and its consequences are not restricted to the realisation of identical ideas and models in new places but include new local creations dependent on and related to the flow. This development and these flows also concern the character, aims and activities of higher education and represent conditions for the development of higher education as parts of society (Waters, 2001). Flows of people, money, products and ideas represent external conditions influencing the organisation of higher education and forms of activity included and developed in higher education. However, there is also a cultural flow and exchange that represents educational content and that is what is focussed in this article. The quality of pedagogical qualitatively assurance in internationalising the content of Higher Education demands a paradigmatic shift supporting an awareness of intercultural meetings in educational contexts. The interesting educational question does not stay with those flows as such, but concerns what they mean in terms of intercultural meetings and cultural content in education and how this is managed (Svensson, 1998; Wihlborg, 2005).

In higher education in Sweden, as in Europe, recent governments bills and national policies for internationalisation of higher education in Europe, Van der Wende, M. (1996) and Kälvemark & Van der Wende (1997) and Kälvemark (1999) and Knight (1999), all emphasises intentions supporting objectives and curricula development that will enhance universities and higher education institutions to make further “efforts so as to enhance the quality of their education and promote understanding of other countries and of international conditions and relations” (The Ministry of Education, Research and Culture, 2004/05:162, p 1). Annerblom (2002) discuss in an evaluation report: Internationalisation of higher education in Sweden, published by the Swedish Council for the Renewal of Higher Education, the importance of maintaining a long-term effect by the exchange programs that are in use, and points to the following up of the experiences from the exchanges in learning and educational context. Altogether, we assert that intercultural knowledge and experiences must become realised in teaching and learning and in order to become explicit we assert that conditions for an educational and didactical framework that underpin this development is called for. The aim is a development of an internationalised educational culture, Svensson & Wihlborg (2007) also reflected through learning outcomes in terms of competencies and capabilities, Bowden (2004) and furthermore, that of scholarship (Cohen, 1997; Barnett, 2005).

Some previous empirical studies concerning the phenomenon of internationalisation

Some previous empirical studies of the nurse education in Sweden were conducted by the present authors between 2000 and 2005, aiming at describing the phenomenon of internationalization as experienced by teachers and students. The nurse education within HE was chosen as an example constituting the investigation context(s), where intentions of internationalization has been emphasised over a long time (HsV 1998:16R; SFS 1992:1434; SFS 1993:100; Jarvis, 1996). Both interviews, Gubrium & Holstein (2001), with students and
teachers and a survey study with teachers were carried out and data were analyzed using a qualitative approach, Marton (1986) and Svensson (1997) with the support of the computer programs, HyperQual and NVivo (Richards, 2000). This paper draws on the results of these interviews with students and teachers as well as the survey study with teachers (Wihlborg, 1999 [study I], 2004a [study II], 2004b [study III]; Wihlborg, 2005; Svensson & Wihlborg, 2007 [study IV]).

In all the studies (I-IV) **four main dimensions** of internationalization were identified concerning what was the content of internationalization according to descriptions given by the participants. These dimensions were discussed against the backdrop of the current curricula objectives and policy documents for HE in general (in Sweden) and specifically for the Swedish nurse education (SFS 1993:100; Jarvis, 1996). Two dimensions were seen as being primarily of organizational character (exchange programs and similarities/differences between countries in formalities of HE); two dimensions were seen as being of educational content character. The latter are (concerning the nurse education) medical and technical, respectively intercultural\(^1\) educational content. Each dimension is constituted by and contains several crucial aspects of importance. The general idea of each dimension is described below.

**Similarities and differences in formalities** (between countries). Internationalization experienced from an organizational perspective, and as leading to an internationally valid Swedish nurse education, competitive (statute wise) with other countries nurse education. There is a focus on comparison between countries of various rules, credit systems\(^2\) and curricula objectives. This dimension is of a general kind, since we can assume that it concerns all educations even though different educations focus on different objectives.

**Exchanges** (between countries) of students and teachers. Internationalization is seen from an organizational perspective focusing increasing possibilities of exchange in general, involving possibilities for students and teachers to participate in an exchange program. It is also experienced by the participants as increasing possibilities in terms of competition about jobs within the field of work. For instance in terms of being able to live and work as a nurse abroad, to become mobile in an international market in general. This dimension is also of a general kind, since ‘rules and conditions’ are focused in relation to guidelines for HE in Sweden and for collaboration with other countries. This dimension has very little connection to an approach to educational content, rather the idea is that knowledge will be developed no matter how and no matter what content the student will encounter for instance by participating in an exchange program.

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\(^1\) We consider a form that relates to ‘a phenomenon based constitution of knowledge’. Intercultural knowledge and understanding emphasize a contextual conceptualized understanding in relation to the interpersonal level, group-level and international level involving several cultures. Cultural competence connotes the meaning of a phenomenon in relation to organizations, groups and individuals. The fusion between cultures meaning and understanding of lifeworld phenomena is not entirely based on commonalities, rather it is the flows of variations that enhance a constitutive approach and support the shaping of internationalisation and globalisation and what is meant by intercultural knowledge.

\(^2\) The Bologna Declaration and the new ECTS (European Community Course-Credit Transfer System) had not been completed when the analysis of the fourth empirical studies was in its final. Lifelong learning and the Bologna Declaration see; http://www.google.se/search?q=cache:TZgY5slV2FQJ:www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/report_SjurBergan.pdf+ECTS+credit+systems&hl=sv Date: 10/10/2004 and www.bologna-bergen2005.no Date:07/05/2005
Medical and technical knowledge as the basis for an internationally valid Swedish nurse education, involving medical-technical competence and nursing capabilities. The emphasis is on that nurse students, when having accomplished the goal to become a qualified nurse, have become technically qualified, leading to good abilities to handle technical equipments important in medical service contexts.

Intercultural knowledge as a basis for an internationally valid nurse education. The focus is on intercultural issues and a vision of a development of intercultural competencies and desirable nursing capabilities, underpinned by the idea that the opening up of boundaries between countries, and an increased flow of people and culture between countries, promotes intercultural competencies. The education as a whole, that is, when having accomplished the goal to become a qualified nurse, is wished for to involve a development of capabilities and abilities of an intercultural character, leading to good qualifications in practical work.

These two dimensions characterized as concerning educational content, of course differs between subject matter fields. Still, we will argue that international competencies and capabilities of an intercultural character, per se, as parts of learning are important features in HE generally, across differences in educational content and qualifications and needs to be brought to the fore in various educational contexts. The nature of these competencies apparently have two sides, content of a specific character and content of a more general intercultural character.

In the previous empirical studies, referred to above, the ideas among students and teachers about formalities, exchange and also medical and technical knowledge concern quite distinct and concrete things, while the ideas about intercultural knowledge and competencies are rather abstract, vague and elusive. At the same time, and somehow paradoxical, it is to a large extent those qualities of intercultural knowledge that is expected to be the benefit of harmonizing the formalities and of the exchanges between countries. There is a main difference in the content thought about seen in relation to cultural differences between knowledge that is thought to be general across cultures and knowledge about cultural differences and what is specific to different cultures.

The medical and technical knowledge and some general qualities of interpersonal relations seen as intercultural knowledge, which are seen as desirable as content and outcome of education, are expected to be similar across cultures. When it comes to the medical technical knowledge the idea seems to be that what is aimed for is rather advanced medical and technical knowledge and this knowledge is assumed to be the same and not culture specific or may be rather to be representing its own taken for granted culture. When it comes to general qualities of interpersonal relations those are at the same time seen as important to nursing in general. It is qualities like not being prejudiced, being open to different views and customs, being willing and able to take others perspectives, listen, be respectful, and so. Those qualities are thought of as general attitudes and capabilities not tied to specific contents and situations but manifested in relation to varying situations and contents. Very much in line with the ability of being and becoming a world citizen (Cogan & Derricott, 1998; Dahlin, 2004; Lapiner, 2004;)

Within the dimension of intercultural knowledge the teachers and students are also including the meeting with and knowledge of situations and content that is different from the own culture. However, there is no emphasis on specific knowledge of other cultures as an aim, content and result of the education. What specific content that is included in the education
seems rather accidental and the idea seems to be that it is mainly a means to develop general intercultural or even inter-human competence, where the specific content is a means rather than an end. This does not totally exclude that the specific content and knowledge is important in specific cases. Thus what has here been named intercultural knowledge is very much seen as a matter of development of general qualities of relating to other humans that are especially demanded and trained in intercultural meetings. However since the content that represent aspects of internationalisation in teaching and learning situations are not underpinned by curricula rationales, because of a non-shared culture and educational goals, this become a rather haphazardly constituted process.

Internationalising educational content

The results referred to above showed that the participants did not share a mutual understanding of the phenomenon of internationalization or a shared curriculum meaning of internationalisation. They also showed that there was a lack of pedagogical/didactical theoretical awareness and approach. This in turn, we will argue, leads to consequences for students in teaching and learning situations and in terms of students’ learning outcome(s). Internationalisation connected with HE is vague and ambiguous. This means that the internationalisation of higher education to a large extent is accidental rather than clearly intended when it comes to educational content.

Learning environments and learning contexts

Education is, at the level of organising activities of students and teachers, a matter of creating learning environments. There may be more or less awareness of, knowledge of, and control over the environments created for the students. Administrators, teachers and students are involved in different ways in the creation of those environments. The creation of learning environments is both a genuine creation, as when students and teachers do something together, and a creation of access to already existing facilities like a university site with its departments, libraries etc. Much of what is called internationalisation in higher education has the character of creating new learning environments, which are considered to be more international in some respect. The most obvious form of this kind of internationalisation is exchange programmes for students and teachers.

What is achieved through this creation of learning environments are affordances, opportunities for learning. What is the more specific content of these affordances, material and human resources, is often not very well known in the educational system. Also, the environments are external to the learner and do not represent what is the context of the learning actually taking place. The context of the actual learning taking place is the parts of the external environment, the resources and possibilities, actually used in learning, which is forming the situational part of the learning context, directly related to the learning. What is used of course depends on what is afforded but also on the learner. The learning also depends on how the resources are used. The learning context also includes what the student uses from his/her previous experience and knowledge in the learning. An intercultural learning environment is expected to involve intercultural meetings, based on cultural flows. However, intercultural learning is dependent on the learners use of these meetings based on his her intentions and previous experiences.
There is a general problem of creating learning environments, steering cultural flows, making certain cultural flows and cultural meetings possible, and thereby the attainment of certain learning outcomes rather than others. This is the problem of what culture is chosen and why. This may be seen as a question of knowledge and power and this is related to a struggle for cultural recognition. In USA this struggle has been very explicit. In the internationalising of the content of any education there is a choice of cultural elements that are made accessible. The problematic nature of this choice is often not made explicit and discussed.

Language and development of knowledge

One very central issue concerning cultural flows in higher education is the language issue. There are two main aspects of this issue: language as content of education and language as medium of education. There is a problematic relation between internationalisation and knowledge of language. If internationalisation is seen as part of globalisation, internationalisation would probably be contrary to multilingualism. Historically most integrations of societies into larger nations, regions and empires seem to be based on language hegemony rather than multilingualism. The present globalisation is paralleled by an increasing hegemony of the English language. More and more people learn and use the English language and this has been part of the development within higher education in most not English speaking countries for many years now. This development represents an internationalisation of the content of higher education studies but in a somewhat one-sided and restricted sense when it comes to cultural flows compared to possible flows. However there is also an increase of the study of other foreign languages, mainly languages talked by rather many people.

Language plays an important role in internationalisation of knowledge content in higher education where language is a medium of expressing and communicating knowledge. The question then becomes one about the use of language as a condition for students’ development of individual knowledge. A critical aspect of this question concerns access. Both in what language there is access to certain knowledge and how students can access knowledge and develop personal knowledge depending on their access to or mastering of language.

Cultural influences and languages are important in the constitution of meaning and understanding, and in learning contexts, in relation to development of knowledge. The possibilities and accessibilities in sense making that are available for the individual(s) need to be addressed and compared between contexts. The learners’ access to learning contexts that include intercultural variation in meanings and understandings must be understood. Such access, in turn, opens up for cultural influences of various kinds in relation to citizenship development involving competencies related the learners’ future profession and field of work as well as in a more general sense.

Students meeting with the learning environments of course involve learning about specific places, people, customs etc. This seems not to be emphasized as the main learning outcomes but is looked upon as means to deeper insights. The development of more international learning environments and learning contexts is expected to lead to valued and wanted learning outcomes. What tend to be focused are very general values and attitudes expressed in acting in intercultural situations and other situations. The question is then, what content, in any learning context within higher education, will support a student learning outcome in terms of competencies that can be recognised as intercultural competencies, in a general sense and in relation to a future profession and working field.
Conditions for internationalising subject matter content

An more active facilitation of internationalisation that is not limited to some formal and organisational changes will need a more developed idea of relevant and prioritised content based on aimed at learning outcomes. The character of the aimed at and expected learning outcome would have to be more clearly delimited. It should be acknowledged that outcomes are not culturally neutral and that they have to be argued for in relation to a multicultural context. It should also be recognised that the learning outcome is dependent on the learners’ activity and way of approaching and using the affordances given through the learning environment. Here we have to realise that the learning outcome is dependent on an attitude and approach by the learner that make possible the cultural understanding and competencies aimed at. If that is not the case it is those values, attitudes and approaches that have to be addressed in education.

We also have to look more carefully at what is afforded through the external learning environment and if the affordances give possibility to learn what is aimed for. When the external environment and/or the learning context include cultural conflicts this needs to become part of and addressed in education. The development of knowledge need to be understood in terms of that the activity of the learner decides (values) the context of learning in relation to the affordances of the learning environment, and the cultural and meaning making character of the activity. Internationalisation of education may be better understood in terms of the pattern of cultural qualities of all the components of the educational process. Policies concerning educational aims and goals as well as organisational, administrative and economic changes and resources would benefit from being more based on an understanding of the educational processes.

Internationalisation of higher education may be looked upon in many different ways. As a phenomenon it can be seen as a part of a general globalisation and as a consequence of an increased mobility between countries and parts of the world. It may be seen as a matter of fact that is interesting to describe and explain, mainly in relation to an increased mobility of people, money, goods and services. This is the main orientation of research on internationalisation of higher education focusing on political, economic and organisational aspects. Within this placing of the phenomenon as part of globalisation it is also common to be rather normative seeing internationalisation of higher education as something necessary and good. This way of looking at and dealing with internationalisation may be used without relation to the educational character of higher education. However one may also want to deepen the understanding of those processes by relating them to the educational character of the activities of higher education, but still with the main interest in the political, economic and organisational aspects of internationalisation. A reason for doing so would be the assumption that how internationalisation is actually taking place is dependent on the character of the activities.

When internationalisation is seen as a goal in higher education this goal could be restricted to political, economic and organisational aspects. This would rather much boil down to increased mobility between higher education systems and indirectly between labour markets and societies and political and economic consequences of increased mobility. Then different measures taken may be evaluated mainly in terms of increased mobility. However, both the mobility and its consequences may be dependent on the educational content and the
consequences certainly are also social and educational in addition to political and economic. There are also social and educational consequences in addition to those directly related to social mobility. However, what are the educational and educational goals and consequences of internationalising higher education is quite unclear and rather implicitly assumed and taken for granted than explicitly formulated.

Within the frame of exchange programs there is usually communication between the instructors in the two countries about the courses taken by the students, their knowledge content and how they may be incorporated in an exam. The incorporation of courses from other countries and cultures may mean an increased cultural variation and in this sense a kind of internationalisation and intercultural knowledge. However, what tend to be focussed is the knowledge content as such and not its intercultural qualities. At the same time the exchanges are assumed and experienced to contribute to intercultural knowledge. Also, there is an increasing intercultural content of education also for students not involved in exchanges. There is an aim of international and intercultural understanding in all different fields of education assumed to be a result of mobility but also of development of the educational content at home. However there seems to be a lack of a theoretical thinking about internationalisation as part of curriculum and the dealing with subject matter in higher education. Internationalisation in this sense will involve a broad view of subject matter and a holistic view of curriculum and the education.

A shift towards a pedagogical dimension in internationalizing higher education

Waters (2001) discusses the path of globalization through time and its influences in social science from the 16th to the 19th centuries. He discusses “three arenas through which globalizing processes take effect, the economy, the polity and culture” (Waters 2001, p. 22) and points to the global idealization and reflexive individuation of today. He maintains that “the new world chaos” equals “globalizing cultures” (Waters 2001, p. 182), and says;

…as material interpendence increases and as political sovereignty is whittled away, trans-national, inter-societal connections eventually become more dense and important than national, intra-social ones. The central features of this acceleration are compression of time and its elimination of space, and an emerging reflexivity or self-conscious intentionality with respect to the globalization process (Waters, 2001, p.182).

We assert that intercultural learning involves learning about social phenomena and global changes and would involve a flow of understandings between people. This will open up for the possibility for developing a global/international consciousness and support global/international citizenship capabilities and competencies. Robertson (1992, 1998) and Waters (2001) discuss a form of emergent holistic consciousness. On a global level, this would involve cultures being connected to a complex collective whole, a form of collective consciousness. Intercultural learning would be in the form of transnational meaning and understanding and experience.

As stated by Svensson (referring to Hannerz, 1992), “culture is based on creation of meaning” (Svensson, 1998, p. 124). Svensson raises questions concerned with the nature of cultural changes and the meaning of culture and says that “transnational cultural flows represent conditions for the flows between cultures and flows between cultures mean cultural change. The flow and the change have their basis in the cultural nature of man” (Svensson, 1998,
Svensson discusses education as flows between cultural contexts and the relation between cultural elements in relation to education and says that:

“Cultural changes dependent on transnational cultural flows are here seen as a matter of how externalizations of meaning within one culture are dependent on externalization of meaning within another culture. This kind of dependence and influence is only a special case of relations between externalizations of meaning. The character of such relations is a main preoccupation within education as a discipline, although they are not usually referred to in those general terms.” (Svensson, 1998, p. 124.)

Until now the concern with the internationalization of HE (universities) has been, as stated in this paper, from an organisational/system level, closely linked with economical-political-policy demands and presumptions and assumptions of various kinds (Adler, 1997; Chaffee & Jacobson, 1997; Sporn, 1996, among others). What have been discussed are universities in relation to an external international environment. Bartell (2003) for instance claims that over the two last decades worldwide, universities have “come under increasing pressures to adapt to rapidly changing social, technological, economic and political forces emanating from immediate as well as from broader post-industrial external environment” (Bartell, 2003, p. 43). There has also been a focus on academic and organisational climates and cultures in HE, a focus which also belongs to an organizational perspective and is also closely linked to economy, politics and approaches in policy (Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Austin, 1990; Rhoads & Tierney, 1990). Very few, if any qualitative investigations, have been carried out concerning the experience of aspects of internationalization as interpreted by students and teachers in terms of and in relation to teaching and learning situations, that is, based on how intentions of internationalization in HE is carried out in praxis. This is a bottom-up perspective, unlike what has been done in most research, research that make the meaning and understanding of students and teachers experiences come to the fore. Also research that concerns and develops a didactical and pedagogical dimension concerning what to learn (educational content) and how to learn (approaches to teaching and learning) aspects of internationalization are missing. There is a need of a development of a shared culture and a curriculum including an understanding of internationalisation, in higher education (Svensson & Wihlborg, 2007). The results from the investigations referred to in this paper revealed institutional and cultural constraints but they also point at conditions for change and the need for a curriculum theory as a condition for change (Svensson & Wihlborg, 2007).

Barnett’s (2004) wonders “how might we understand ‘the university’ and can HE be any longer taken to offer a liberal education?” (Barnett, 2004, p. 71). Barnett maintains the need for the universities and their new universal purpose as “compounding our conceptual turmoil, enabling us internally (ontologically) to handle the uncertain state of being” (Barnett, 2004, p. 72). If one agrees on this and the living in an age of supercomplexity, Barnett (2000) our suggestion is, that the discourse concerned with teaching, learning and qualities of internationalization/globalization in HE, should by necessity involve a pedagogical/didactical dimension. The shape and space, what content and how we decide to elucidate qualities, those of internationalization/globalization of HE, calls for immediately and further elaboration and research. Globalization and the need for curricula change will become the great challenge in HE worldwide in the decades to come, a change that many other authors also mention as important (Wells et al., 1998; Urry, 2005; Mesterhauser, 1998). Curricular change and educational change should primarily take place from a pedagogical/didactical stance. This implies an awareness of possible flows of cultural elements, supporting people (students and teachers) in the constitution of meaning and understanding of international features, both on an educational contextual level as an international society ‘contextual’ level. What is called
for is a curriculum theory involving ontological and epistemological rationales for
internationalised teaching and learning and changes in terms of a scholarly approach.

A didactical approach to internationalization is important for several reasons. The main reason
is that the practice would be able to critically reflect on, when it comes to what is meant by
internationalized teaching and learning, and for what reasons and by what claims the
concretized interpretations of (the) curricular objectives that represent internationalization of
the educational program, exist. What are the ontological and epistemological arguments for
claiming what should be included in achieving curricular objectives regarding an
internationalized education? What research is going on concerning aspects of
internationalization concerned with intercultural features essential for the educational context
in question? How students learn and why the knowledge achieved is of importance, would
then become open to reflect on, and in turn, open up for the possibility to problematise what
features to change or support and promote in praxis.

Svensson (1998) says “to deal with the flow of culture, there is a need for a meaning of
culture, that is focusing more on the elements of culture, their constitution, nature and
relations” (Svensson, p. 15) and raises the question;

> How do people learn form another culture? By learn we mean how they change their
externalizations of meaning in relation to externalizations coming form another culture.
Although we do not see this change as mainly a matter of acquiring or reproducing the
given externalization, the relation to the given is fundamental to the understanding of the
change together with the reaction to one’s own context of experience and tradition.

Svensson (1998, p. 19) also says that “the combination of a focus on cultural elements and
cultural flows is fundamental to an educational perspective and an educational perspective is
fundamental to a deeper understanding of the creation and flow of cultural units” (Svensson,
p. 19).

Our conclusion is that, though internationalization of H E is highly emphasized by writers in
the educational sphere, no discourse has yet been established investigating the phenomenon
from a pedagogical/didactical stance, or by describing the phenomenon in didactical terms
involving teachers ways of ‘handling teaching and learning’ of aspects of internationalization
in praxis, and an understanding of the phenomenon in relation to curricular objectives stated
for H E. We argue that this is one of our important and mutual pedagogical challenges for the
21st century.
References


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Introduction

I want to talk with you today about some of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority’s (NZQA) experiences in working towards qualifications recognition arrangements, in particular with quality assurance bodies in Malaysia and China.

This paper presents a discussion of the inter-relationships between developing qualification recognition arrangements and the external quality assurance systems that underpin qualifications. The focus will be on the process for developing confidence in those quality assurance systems. It suggests a model for engaging in this process and highlights some principles that might underpin that engagement.

Multi-lateral processes and agreements can also facilitate greater qualifications recognition. The Bologna Process and Lisbon Convention are European examples of this. In the Asia Pacific region, the Brisbane Communiqué and work under the framework of the Asia Pacific Quality Network are moves towards levels of greater mutual recognition. While acknowledging this wider framework, this paper focuses on bilateral engagement.

I must add that while this paper draws on NZQA’s experiences, it is the authors’ personal opinions, and not, in any way, a reflection of an NZQA or “New Zealand” official position.

About NZQA

NZQA is a government agency, primarily responsible for quality assurance matters in New Zealand’s tertiary education sector, with the exception of New Zealand’s eight universities, where the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors’ Committee (NZVCC) is responsible for quality assurance.

NZQA is responsible for directly quality assuring the 850+ private training establishments in New Zealand, along with 11 Government training establishments and 3 Wānanga. NZQA delegates its quality assurance responsibilities for New Zealand’s 19 institutes of technology and polytechnics to the Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality (ITPQ).

As well as being responsible for quality assurance in the tertiary sector, NZQA has a role in assisting in the recognition of overseas qualifications. A specialist unit within NZQA assesses overseas qualifications on a case-by-case, cost-recovery basis.

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<table>
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| Title      | **Building Mutual Confidence in Quality Assurance Systems:**  
             **A Sound Foundation for Qualifications Recognition** |
| Presenters | Mike Willing, Deputy Chief Executive  
             Quality Assurance Division  
             Richard Matthews, Manager - International  
             New Zealand Qualifications Authority  
             Sam Lockyer, International Advisor |
What is Qualifications Recognition?

When I talk about qualifications recognition I am referring to the process in which a qualification that is awarded in one country is recognised as substantially equivalent to a qualification in another country. Qualifications recognition means explicitly acknowledging the relationship between qualifications in different countries.

What qualifications recognition is not, is harmonisation of systems or the development of common standards for qualifications. Qualifications recognition focuses on “translating” respective national qualifications systems as they are, rather than changing them to make them more compatible. That being said, changes to systems can make qualifications easier (or harder) to translate.

There are two typical approaches to qualification recognition:

- A broad form of recognition, where a government and/or bodies with delegated authority officially recognize another country’s qualification system, or particular category of qualifications; or
- Specific recognition of an individual’s qualification on a case-by-case basis.

These often exist in conjunction – where a general agreement in principle at the broad level, will be supplemented by case-by-case comparison in practice.

Qualification assessment is undertaken by a range of bodies in New Zealand, depending on why the qualification was submitted. The general approach of NZQA involves comparing for equivalence of the international qualification to the relevant New Zealand qualification on the Register of Quality Assured Qualifications.

Why have Qualifications Recognition Arrangements?

The degree of mobility of students, professionals and other skilled workers that has developed globally has lead to a greater demand for qualifications recognition and has seen a wider range of groups with an interest in recognition. While existing procedures for recognition on a case-by-case basis meet this demand, Qualifications Recognition Arrangements (QRAs) have the potential to deliver recognition much more efficiently, by providing some degree of automatic recognition for the qualifications covered by the QRA.

They also have the added advantage of being able to cover more than the traditional academic qualifications included in, for example, existing regional recognition conventions. This increases their potential impact in facilitating the mobility of professionals and other skilled workers.
The link with Quality Assurance

A qualification is a formal signifier of skills, knowledge and competency an individual has acquired through a course of study (or through experiential learning in some cases). An assessment of the “worth” of that qualification can be based on a number of attributes including:

- The content and conduct of the course of learning
- The wider learning environment provided by the institution(s) where the qualification was gained
- The robustness and validity of assessment processes, and
- The robustness and validity of the teaching processes.

One way of obtaining comfort on these issues is through the presence of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms.

QRAs are not going to be an appropriate tool for qualifications recognition in all situations and they do not have to encompass every qualification offered in a country. It is essential that a body evaluating qualifications gained in another country can be confident about not just the content of those qualifications, but also the quality assurance of the processes that underpins them. This holds true for qualifications covered by a QRA.

Central to determining whether a QRA is appropriate is the existence of quality assurance systems that are comparably rigorous, fair and transparent. Building confidence in another country’s quality assurance system is essential to ensure that the qualifications awarded in each system are sufficiently comparable to allow benchmarking to occur and are fit for the purpose for which they will be used, for example that a bachelor’s degree awarded in one country is a fit basis for undertaking further study in another country.

In order to build this confidence, a thorough understanding of all the quality assurance systems involved needs to be gained by both parties.

Developing Qualifications Recognition Arrangements

Developing a QRA is a multi-stage process. As already mentioned, confidence in the rigour, fairness and transparency of quality assurance systems needs to be established. This can be achieved through an extensive period of information exchange, leading to a decision on whether to actually negotiate a QRA.

The process doesn’t end here of course. At the completion of negotiations, all those who sign the agreement will need to benchmark their partner’s qualifications against their own system. Finally, the benchmarking information will need to be monitored, updated and made available to employers, education institutions and others with an interest, so that the full benefits of the agreement can be achieved.

At the present time, New Zealand is in the process of considering QRAs with Malaysia and China. New Zealand’s involvement with Malaysia and China has been facilitated by the free trade negotiations underway with both countries. Trade agreements often have some coverage of recognition issues, but usually do not actually create a state of mutual qualification recognition. Instead they encourage and allow for the possibility at a later date.
This rest of this paper is based on NZQA’s experiences with the first phase of initial analysis preceding the actual negotiation of a QRA. It also outlines an approach that may be taken if the initial analysis indicates that a QRA is feasible.

One area that will not be discussed in this paper is the place of mutual recognition for professional registration. In New Zealand, like most countries in the world, professional registration bodies are often autonomous and either set their own requirements for registration or have them enshrined in legislation. This means that they are often responsible for developing and negotiating their own recognition arrangements.

Building Confidence

Undertaking a thorough initial analysis of whether or not to enter into negotiations is the first, and perhaps most important, stage in the process of developing a QRA. A possible model for achieving this involves:

- information exchanges at a high-level often involving an understanding of each other’s education system,
- signing a Memorandum of Understanding or exchange of letters between two or more agencies,
- followed up by in-depth research into both quality assurance systems, and
- analysis of that information to determine that both quality assurance systems apply rigorous, fair and transparent processes.

Multiple visits, exchanges of information and direct observance of quality assurance processes in practice may be necessary before mutual confidence is achieved. The objective is to understand and be confident in each other’s systems, which will enable ongoing confidence in the judgement each other applies to quality assurance decisions, rather than to have to assess each individual decision on a case-by-case basis.

Information Exchanges

Information exchange is a particularly important part of the process.

New Zealand, for example, is able to point to the Register of Quality Assured Qualifications, which is a comprehensive list of all quality assured qualifications in New Zealand, as the most obvious sign of qualifications in New Zealand are quality assured.

In addition, as NZQA is the legislated body responsible for New Zealand’s qualifications framework, there is one agency that can generally take the lead for New Zealand in negotiations. In other countries the situation can be completely different, for example, there may be no central agency with overall responsibility for the qualifications system. Most countries have a system that often separates higher education, senior secondary, and vocational and training qualifications. In practice, the information exchange process has provided an opportunity to gain a much clearer understanding of where responsibility for quality assurance lies in our partner countries.

In the initial stages of engagement, the type of information exchanged has been limited to introductions to the whole education system and those involved have been small groups of representatives of government agencies. Often this initially occurs between the two Ministries of Education and then this cascades down to those divisions or agencies that have responsibility for qualifications and / or quality assurance. At this point the objective is building trust between the agencies responsible for overseeing quality assurance. As is to be
expected this is an iterative process, as officials clarify exactly what each other does, including agreeing on definitions.

Workshops

The next stage, once there is at least initial interest from both sides in progressing beyond the introductory information exchanges, can be holding a more formal workshop or forum that may include participants from outside the government sector. These workshops can be extremely useful as a starting point for information exchange at a more “nuts and bolts” level. These meetings can cover not only the official viewpoint, looking at the legal and regulatory frameworks that sit behind the respective quality assurance systems, but also the experiences of those responsible for implementing the systems in practice.

In practice, this approach also offers an opportunity for the agencies actually developing the QRA to involve other stakeholders in the process and obtain their “buy-in”.

Any partner in a QRA with New Zealand would need to be confident that quality assurance systems are robust throughout New Zealand’s education sector. This means the early, and crucial, involvement of the NZVCC and ITPQ as well as NZQA, as these bodies are responsible for the external quality assurance of significant elements of the education sector.

Malaysia Workshop

New Zealand has been involved in two such workshops in the last 18 months, which have had slightly different formats. An initial presentation on qualifications and quality assurance systems was held as part of the Malaysia – New Zealand FTA discussions in August 2005. This was attended by a significant number of government and education officials as well as some professional registration bodies. The second forum with Malaysia, held in Kuala Lumpur in March 2006, consisted of representatives from quality assurance bodies (QABs), NZQA, NZVCC and ITPQ from New Zealand and Lembaga Akreditasi Negara (the Malaysian National Accreditation Board), Quality Assurance Division, Ministry of Higher Education and Public Service Department from Malaysia as well as representatives from a number of different professional registration bodies. In addition, the New Zealand High Commissioner and his staff also attended for some sessions. The participants were able to provide an overview and discuss their respective quality assurance frameworks, how they evaluate and recognise qualifications and the next steps towards mutual recognition.

Both countries presented an overview of their education system as a whole and then, with presentations from each of the QABs, delved into more detail about the quality assurance standards, procedures and policies each country has. This was followed by an open discussion on the similarities and differences between the two systems. There were also presentations on the processes used by both countries to evaluate and recognise foreign qualifications. This focused on the standards, procedures and policies used to evaluate qualifications and the legal and regulatory frameworks that underpin them.

At the conclusion of this exchange of information, the workshop looked at how to progress further cooperation between both countries and what the next steps in the process should be. It was agreed that a smaller group of officials from both lead organisations (LAN and NZQA) would work together on establishing a mechanism for accepting each other’s quality assurance systems. It was expected that this would largely occur through an exchange of officials working in both countries.
In this case, both parties had an existing relationship built on Memoranda of Understanding signed by the two Ministries of Education. A thorough understanding of each other’s education systems along with a growing sense of trust was developed in both countries through a series of annual Joint Working Groups, which NZQA participated in. In addition, NZQA has also participated in the Asia Pacific Quality Network, which has contributed to a greater understanding of quality assurance systems between the two countries. A quite high level of basic understanding of each other’s systems already existed, which the workshop was able to build on.

**China Workshops**

New Zealand’s engagement with China, on the other hand, has been much more exploratory. At the start of the process, the existing relationship between the QABs of both countries was limited. In fact, one of the objectives for the information exchange process was identifying the agencies that needed to be involved. As with Malaysia, an introductory workshop was organised for government officials to explore each other’s quality assurance systems. This was held in Queenstown, New Zealand, in May 2006 as part of the seventh round of talks in the China-New Zealand, but did not involve representatives from the non-government agencies (for example NZVCC or ITPQ) involved in quality assurance. A second presentation was made as part of the eighth round of talks in the China – New Zealand FTA in Beijing. This workshop provided an opportunity to give a brief overview, to a wider range of government officials about the New Zealand quality assurance system.

At the earlier Joint Working Group meeting between the Chinese and New Zealand Ministries of Education, it was agreed that there was to be a study tour to assist in understanding the qualifications and quality assurance systems. This coincided with the FTA discussions and it was decided to hold a workshop in Beijing in November 2006. This workshop had a much broader range of presenters, including non-government quality assurance agencies and tertiary institutions, and covered topics in more detail.

The primary goal of the workshop, other than exchanging information, was to demonstrate that both countries’ had robust quality assurance systems. Speakers from NZQA, NZVCC and ITPQ and China’s Ministry of Education, the China Academic Degrees & Graduate Education Development Centre and the China Service Centre for Scholarly Exchange covered external quality assurance. As well as providing a broad overview of both systems, as the workshop with Malaysia had done, specific aspects of quality assurance activities were discussed. For example, Chinese QABs gave presentations on quality assurance processes for post-graduate courses and for cross-border education and New Zealand presenters New Zealand QABs talked about quality assurance for degrees and quality assurance in universities.

As well as these presentations from QABs, tertiary institutions from both countries provided an explanation of their internal quality assurance systems. Presenters from New Zealand discussed how they build quality assurance into everyday practice, quality assurance for private degree granting institutions and pastoral care for students and Chinese institutions gave presentations on quality assurance for joint degrees, and cross-border education.

This workshop coincided with a meeting of the China – New Zealand Joint Working Group so the opportunity was also taken to have both the Chinese Vice-Minister of Education and New Zealand’s Secretary of Education speak at the workshop.

The quality assurance workshops have provided an extremely useful forum for gathering and exchanging information. They have been an excellent vehicle for building confidence in each
other’s systems and have produced benefits in terms of building relationships between agencies that can be leveraged even without a QRA.

The information exchanged during these workshops has also given those responsible for determining the feasibility of any QRA an opportunity to gain an initial understanding of where the compatibilities between systems appear to exist and where more information needs to be gathered in the next stage of the process.

Next Steps

If the initial information exchanges are successful in establishing a degree of confidence in the quality assurance systems of potential partner countries, the next step should be a move to undertake detailed research. The purpose of this research should be the production of reports that decision makers will be able to use to determine whether or not to enter into negotiations and which parts of the qualifications systems should be covered by a QRA. It may be that the agencies that will be responsible for actually negotiating a QRA will not have the resources, in terms of skilled researchers, to carry out this research and it will have to be left to outside contractors.

At this point in time, in order to maintain any momentum that the initial information exchange phase has generated, a Joint Committee may be established. The Joint Committee would necessarily be composed of representatives of each country's QABs, Ministries of Education and possibly other government agencies with an interest in the outcome of a QRA.

The responsibilities of such a committee could include:

- overseeing research into quality assurance systems, setting terms of reference and putting concrete timelines in place for this research to be completed;
- analysing the information once it has been collected;
- recommending whether negotiations should begin;
- negotiating the QRA; and
- monitoring and maintaining the QRA through the changes to qualifications systems that will naturally occur.

Monitoring and maintaining the QRA will be an equally, if not more, difficult task than actually achieving the QRA. A key part of this stage will involve each party benchmarking the other’s qualifications against their own and the creation of a mechanism to allow stakeholders to access that information. As well as undergoing an initial benchmarking, each party will need to regularly update the mechanism as the status of qualifications change or new ones are added.

Conclusion

This paper focused on the importance of the linkages between quality assurance and qualifications in developing QRAs. QRAs are likely to become more common as a more efficient way of dealing with the increasing mobility of students, professionals and other skilled workers than traditional case-by-case recognition. They are not, however, always going to be appropriate. The first goal, therefore, in the process of deciding whether a QRA is appropriate should be establishing mutual confidence in the quality assurance underpinning the qualifications that each country awards.