Proceedings of the International Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Standards, Mechanisms and Mutual Recognition

Bangkok, Thailand
8-10 November 2000

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Edited by Grant Harman
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MINISTRY OF UNIVERSITY AFFAIRS OF THAILAND AND UNESCO PRINCIPAL REGIONAL OFFICE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC, BANGKOK
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<td>AAU</td>
<td>Academic Audit Unit</td>
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<td>ACER</td>
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<td>ACU</td>
<td>Association of Commonwealth Universities</td>
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<td>APEC</td>
<td>Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation</td>
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<td>Australian Qualifications Framework</td>
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<td>Australian Universities Quality Agency</td>
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<td>Course Experience Questionnaire</td>
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<td>Council for National Academic Awards</td>
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<td>Association of European Universities</td>
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<td>Department of Education, Culture and Sports</td>
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<td>Euro Credit Transfer Scheme</td>
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<td>Global Alliance for Transnational Education</td>
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<td>General Agreement of Trade &amp; Services</td>
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<td>MEQAC</td>
<td>Medical Education Quality Assurance Committee</td>
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<td>MUA</td>
<td>Ministry of University Affairs</td>
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<td>National Accreditation Board.</td>
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<td>National Institute of Education Planning &amp; Administration</td>
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<td>Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire</td>
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<td>Presidential Commission to Survey Philippine Education</td>
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<td>Quality Assurance Authority of New Zealand</td>
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<td>RIHED</td>
<td>Regional Centre of Higher Education and Development</td>
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<td>SCUA</td>
<td>Steering Committee for University Accreditation</td>
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<td>Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization</td>
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<td>University Mobility in the Asia Pacific</td>
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Introduction

By

Professor Grant Harman
Centre for Higher Education Management and Policy
University of New England, Armidale, Australia

This publication brings together in a convenient form the opening and closing addresses together with the plenary addresses and key technical papers presented at the International Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Standards, Mechanisms and Mutual Recognition held in Bangkok from 8 to 10 November 2000. The conference was organised jointly by the Ministry of University Affairs of Thailand and the UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (PROAP) located in Bangkok, in collaboration with the British Council, the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, MONBUSHO, the Council of Rectors of Europe, SEAMEO RIHED, the ASEAN University Network, the Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific, and the Australian Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

The aim of the publication is to share experience on policy and practice for quality assurance in higher education across the countries of the Asia Pacific region and to make available to a wider audience key ideas, methodologies and strategies presented at the conference. Above all else, the conference demonstrated wide interest in quality assurance across the region and that in many countries both governments and higher education institutions are working actively to establish new mechanisms of quality assurance and quality improvement. Quality assurance clearly is a major issue for higher education across the region and it seems certain to continue to be of key issue concern for the next decade and beyond.

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Quality assurance in higher education has become not only an institutional and national issue across the Asia Pacific region but also a global one. Universities and colleges throughout the world today are focusing special attention on designing and implementing new quality assurance mechanisms and systems in order to ensure that students receive high quality and relevant education and that degrees and diplomas are widely recognised. Such recognition is seen to be essential not only by national governments and employers but also by other universities and employers internationally.

Quality assurance in higher education can be defined as systematic management and assessment procedures adopted by higher education institutions and systems in order to monitor performance against objectives, and to ensure achievement of quality outputs and quality improvements. Essentially, quality assurance systems aim to provide appropriate evidence to substantiate claims made about quality and so to enable key stakeholders to have confidence about the management of quality and the level of outcomes achieved.
Stakeholders are individuals and groups who have a major interest in higher education institutions and systems, and their work and achievements.

Quality assurance serves a number of purposes. Apart from protecting student and employer interests and facilitating international recognition of the standards of awards, it is an important element for public accountability purposes, particularly to satisfy taxpayers about value for money and that government subsidies are supporting education activities of an appropriate standard. Quality assurance helps inform student choice, especially in the light of a growing diversity of course offerings. It also can contribute to improved teaching and administrative processes and help disseminate good practice, leading to overall system improvement.

Quality assurance is particularly important in an age of globalisation and growth of knowledge based economies. Globalisation has brought numerous benefits especially for countries that have been able to take advantage of liberalisation of trade and technological breakthroughs. At the same time, globalisation demands greater mobility of professional and skilled labour as well as increased efforts to achieve mutual recognition of university and college awards. In the modern world, more effective cooperation between higher education institutions and nations is essential.

Quality assurance today is driven by a number of pressures, many of which produce tensions and conflicts. These include the tensions and conflicts between the explosion and fragmentation of demand for student places on the one hand, and unemployment which affects an ever growing number of graduates in a number of countries of the region on the other; between the provision of equal access and opportunity, and the financial constraints that follow the mass extension of higher education; between the pressures for increased institutional autonomy versus those for growing public accountability; and between ethical and moral obligations and the various pressures for the generation and communication of new knowledge and scientific discoveries. Faced with these pressures, higher education must develop new visions and new forms of cooperation across both institutions and nations.

As the conference brochure emphasised, the issue of quality cannot be disassociated from the quest for excellence, while the setting of academic standards and evaluation criteria should take into account the diversity of situations across the region. Each nation and higher education system should aim to put in place quality assurance systems and procedures that meet the needs and the culture of the local society. Importation of systems from one country to another needs to handled with care so that any new set of arrangements and anchored firmly in cultural and social traditions.

**Conference Objectives and Organisation**

The conference was organised by the Ministry of University Affairs with advice from UNESCO PROAP and collaborating organisations.

The specific objectives of the conference were well stated in the conference documentation. These were as follows:

1. To share and exchange information and experiences on critical issues such as standards, mechanisms, credit transfer, mutual recognition, and ranking on quality assurance in higher education among experts, academics, administrators and policy makers;
2. to explore and identify trends and best practices on quality assurance in higher education;

3. to develop recommendations for and promote international cooperation in improving quality assurance in higher education; and

4. to explore regional cooperation in quality assurance in higher education.

The conference programme was organised around the three sub-themes of: standards and international recognition; quality assurance mechanisms; and credit transfer and mutual recognition. Seven keynote addresses covered the areas of: quality assurance policy; quality assurance practice; standards for quality assurance; mechanisms of quality assurance; benchmarking and quality assurance; international quality assurance; and credit transfer and mutual recognition. Keynote speakers came from Thailand, Singapore, England, New Zealand and Australia.

**Organisation of this Publication**

This publication is organised into five main sections. The first is made up of the opening addresses given at the formal commencement and ceremony. The conference was honoured to have had addresses from both the Prime Minister of Thailand and the Minister of University Affairs as well as the Permanent Secretary for University Affairs. The second section comprises those plenary addresses for which presenters made detailed papers available. The third section contains a selection of country and institutional reports on lessons learnt in quality assurance and accreditation. Unfortunately, because of space limitations, it was not possible to include all papers presented at conference sessions. The fourth section comprises the closing address presented by the Permanent Secretary of University Affairs while the final section provides a summary of the main themes of the conference.
I. OPENING ADDRESSES
Welcome Address

By

Associate Professor Dr. Vanchai Sirichana
Permanent Secretary for University Affairs of Thailand

His Excellency the Prime Minister of Thailand, Mr Chuan Leekpai, His Excellency the Minister of University Affairs, Mr Suchon Charmpoonod, Excellencies, Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Distinguished Speakers and Rapporteurs, Honorable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I find this morning an occasion of academic delight to be here today at this 'International Conference on Quality Assurance: Standards, Mechanisms and Mutual Recognition'. On behalf of the Ministry of University Affairs, may I extend my warm welcome to you all, especially those from overseas.

This event is the very first international conference on Quality Assurance the Ministry of University Affairs has conducted, bringing in administrators and academics to work on this important issue of quality development. The programme for the next three days is therefore full with various dimensions surrounding quality assurance.

Furthermore, excellent cooperation has been rendered from regional and international organizations and networks. These include the Asia-Pacific Higher Education Research Network, UNESCO and the ASEAN University Network who have decided to hold their meetings at the same time as this gathering. Because their priorities are placed on quality of higher education, the participants will have increased opportunities to react and create links in the areas of mutual interest, ranging from quality assessment and mutual recognition of degrees to research and networking of quality assurance experts.

In addition to the fruitful participation, please spare some time to see more of the country and its people. I wish to encourage you to stay on until this Saturday when it is our Loykratong festival. The whole city will be brightened up with people young and old going to places along the Chao Praya River to put their floats or 'kratongs' onto the river. This is believed to be a gesture of respect to the goddess of water and to throw away all the bad luck. On the night of the full moon, you will experience the beauty of nature and the joy of the Thai tradition.

I hope your time in Thailand will have the highest quality academically and culturally.
Opening Address

By

His Excellency Mr. Suchon Charmphoonod
Minister of University Affairs of Thailand

Your Excellency Prime Minister of Thailand, Mr Chuan Leekpai, Excellencies, Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Distinguished Speakers and Rapporteurs, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege and a great honour for all of us to have the presence of Your Excellency Prime Minister Mr. Chuan Leekpai to preside over this morning’s opening of the international conference on ‘Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Standards, Mechanisms and Mutual Recognition’. On behalf of the Ministry of University Affairs and participants to this international gathering, may I express my profound thanks to Your Excellency for your presence which clearly signals the seriousness of the Royal Thai Government and your own self in heightening higher education quality development through regional and international cooperation.

Since the Ministry of University Affairs announced its policy and implementation guidelines on quality assurance at higher education level in 1996, it has taken initiatives to work side by side with both public and private universities and colleges to design systems and develop accreditation standards and procedures. Internal quality control mechanisms within higher education institutions are strongly encouraged. To make sure that the whole process of quality enhancement is understood and effectively implemented, extensive studies and pilot projects together with rounds of seminars and training have been conducted.

The significance of standards and the quality assurance system stipulated in the National Education Act of 1999 has escalated the efforts of the Ministry of University Affairs. The Act specified that there shall be a system of educational quality assurance to ensure improvement of educational quality and standards at all levels of education. Such a system shall be comprised of both internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. Internal quality assurance shall be regarded as part of educational administration, which must be a continuous process. Annual reports of the institutions have to be made available to the public in order to improve educational quality and standards and be prepared for the external quality assurance evaluation.

With the rapid movement of globalization, international collaborative relationships among nations are essential. The Ministry of University Affairs has considered it necessary to call attention and collective cooperation of countries and regions to international quality assurance systems including mutual recognition. Thailand, in particular, could also strengthen her endeavours through partnership in networks in Greater Mekong Subregion and ASEAN as well as other regional and international groupings.
This international conference aims to share and exchange information and experiences on such critical issues as standards, mechanisms, credit transfer and mutual recognition both in country and foreign countries; to explore and identify trends and best practices on quality assurance in higher education; to develop recommendations for and promote international cooperation in improving quality assurance in higher education; and to explore regional cooperation in quality assurance in higher education. The conference will involve keynote speakers who are experts in quality and assessment and other presenters who will report on lessons learned, particularly about standards, quality assurance mechanisms and mutual recognition of qualifications in various countries within the ASEAN countries, Asia, Europe and the United States. A number of regional and international organizations have also offered to share their views and expertise.

I am pleased to inform His Excellency the Prime Minister that the conference has received overwhelming attention and interest from both local and foreign participants, greatly exceeding our expectations. Considering the fact that this venue can at most accommodate 650 participants, the Ministry has decided to employ its university network with its videoconferencing facilities available in all public universities to televise the whole programme for administrators, faculty and interested individuals nationwide. A special videoconference session is also set for the conference to listen to and interact with a prominent speaker from New Zealand who cannot join us physically and who has kindly agreed to speak through use of electronic means.

To organize this very important international meeting, the Ministry of University Affairs has received excellent cooperation from a large number of agencies, particularly, UNESCO, the British Council, SEAMEO RIHED, the ASEAN University Network, the Council for Rectors of Europe, the Association of Universities of Asia and the Pacific, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, and Australia's Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. With their strong support, I am confident that this conference will mark another quality step of higher education cooperation.

As time is now auspicious, may I now invite His Excellency the Prime Minister, Mr Chuan Leekpai, to open this international conference on ‘Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Standards, Mechanisms and Mutual Recognition’.
Opening Address

By

His Excellency Mr. Chuan Leekpai
Prime Minister of Thailand

Minister Suchon Charmponnod, Associate Professor Dr. Vanchai Sirichana, Mr. Zhou Nanzhau, Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me, first of all, to extend a warm welcome to all of you. As someone who has long been involved in the field of education, I am very pleased that this International Conference has attracted so many distinguished scholars and academic experts from around the world. I am thus confident that this meeting will succeed not only in promoting increased awareness about the importance of quality assurance in higher education, but also in strengthening our common efforts to raise the quality of our education, both nationally and regionally.

The globalisation process has brought with it numerous benefits, especially for those countries that have been able to take advantage of all the market liberalisation and technological breakthroughs currently being made. Yet, for many countries, notably those less developed, globalisation has been fraught with difficulties and seemingly insurmountable challenges, marginalising those less prepared even further. The present trend towards a more knowledge-based economy, away from one that has traditionally been resource-based and labour-intensive, has worsened the situation, particularly for those of us on the wrong side of the so-called Digital Divide.

Faced with such a situation, it is incumbent upon all of us to do what we can to better prepare our countries for what lies ahead, improving upon and streamlining our economic, political and social structures so that they achieve internationally-recognised standards. Most importantly, however, I believe we must do more to further develop our human resources, making them more knowledgeable and, in turn, more productive. This can be achieved only through an education system that is better and of a higher standard.

This is certainly what we in Thailand have been striving for. While we have achieved satisfactory progress in providing increased educational opportunities for our people, we have also sought to improve upon the qualitative aspect of our education system. Under our National Education Act, promulgated last year, specific provisions have been made for educational standards and quality assurance mechanisms. This is of extreme importance if our education system is to produce qualified graduates who are accepted and recognised domestically as well as internationally.

As with most countries, we have adopted an approach based upon both internal and external quality assurance. Here, I believe, a balance must be found between an institution's autonomy and accountability. While we must protect the principles of academic freedom, our
educational institutions must also be ready to accept quality auditing and evaluation by outside agencies.

At the same time, I believe quality assurance should go beyond being a mere tool to help us measure the standard of our educational institutions. A quality assurance system should be more comprehensive, incorporating educational philosophies and providing, among other things, guidelines on how to improve upon an institution's teaching and learning processes, student development activities, and research programmes. It should also address issues of better management and governance, helping educational institutions to become more professional which, in turn, will help them provide education of a higher standard.

In addition to helping lift the standard of our education system, uniform quality assurance in higher education is also important given the increasingly inter-dependent world in which we live. Indeed, as our peoples become more mobile, moving from one country to another with greater frequency, there is a need for standards and benchmarks to be developed that would allow for the mutual recognition of credits and degrees awarded.

For this to be achieved, collaborative efforts at both the regional and international level are required. I am therefore pleased to have learnt that our educational institutions have already been co-operating closely in a number of areas, including the provision of joint degree programmes, the exchange of both students and academics and the increased networking between both our peoples and institutions.

This International Conference is another important step in this direction. Besides reflecting our commitment to achieve a better education system, this meeting will, I believe, also provide you with a valuable opportunity to exchange views and experiences in your efforts to promote quality assurance in your respective countries. It is also my hope that you will use this meeting to discuss how to further strengthen our co-operative endeavours so as to achieve a higher education system that is not only of higher standards, but also one that will better prepare our peoples for all the challenges of the new century and the new Millennium.

On this note, I take great pleasure in declaring open this International Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
Opening Address

By

Dr. Zhou Nan-zhao
Director a.i. UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (PROAP)

It gives me great pleasure and honor to welcome all of you to this distinguished gathering on behalf of Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, UNESCO Director-General.

In the name of UNESCO Principle Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, I would like to convey my deep appreciation and sincere thanks to His Excellency, Mr. Suchon Charmponood, Minister of University Affairs, Thailand, and Dr. Vanchai Sirichana, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of University Affairs, Thailand, and their staff for their strong commitment and contribution to the successful efforts in organization of this timely Conference.

My thanks go also to Dr. Padoongchart Suwannawongse, Director of SEAMEO RIHED for his collaborative efforts with the Ministry of University Affairs and UNESCO-PROAP in preparing for this Conference.

As a follow up to the world Conference on Higher Education this significant Conference is taking place at a crucial time when worldwide phenomenon is occurring wherein countries are rapidly evolving into post-industrial knowledge-based economies. In such economies, information and knowledge replace physical and financial capital as the major competitive advantage in business and higher education has therefore become one of the driving force of development as well as a focal point of learning. For our Asia-Pacific region, where most Member States are developing countries, the responsibility of universities for sustainable national development is more acute and cannot be over-emphasized.

In view of the crucial importance of higher education to national development, quality assurance has assumed greater significance in the various dimensions of teaching/learning activities at tertiary level. Along with expansion, relevance, diversification, and internationalization, the shift of emphasis to quality improvement has been a major policy issue as well as worldwide trend in higher education.

Over the past decade, many countries have made hard efforts in developing quality assurance systems and mechanism in attempts to turn more institutions of higher learning into centres of excellence and to develop 'world-class universities'. However, as globalization has redrawn the world education as well as economic map, no single higher education institution can hope to achieve internationally recognized standards and become a 'first-rate' university isolated from the wider academic community.

Quality assurance needs an international dimension: transfer of knowledge, sharing of information, mobility of teachers and students, international joint research projects, and interactive networking such as the UNESCO UNITWIN Programme, while taking into account the national cultural values and circumstances.
In this regard, the issue of quality assurance cannot be disassociated from that of mutual recognition since internationally recognized universities are believed to be high-quality institutions against international standards.

Therefore I am happy to note that the International Conference on Quality Assurance is coinciding with the Sixth Session of the Asia-Pacific Regional Committee for Regional Convention on Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education, both of which will be most meaningful events for the development of higher education in our region.

As an inter-government organization, UNESCO has always strived to promote intellectual collaboration, which serves as an instrument for rapprochement and as an essential tool for action. In following up the World Conference on Higher Education in 1998, it remains ready, at your disposal, to respond to the needs of Member States and its many partners and associates on the international scene in the development and reform of higher education in general and its quality assurance in particular.

The deliberations on the central and sub-themes of this International Conference will throw much light on various dimensions of quality assurance. With your experiences, and collective wisdom, the Conference will definitely produce meaningful outcomes to assure higher quality of higher education for human-centred socio-economic development in the region and at international level.

Once again I thank you all for your participating extend my warmest greetings to all distinguished participants and wish you full success in your deliberations.
II. KEYNOTE ADDRESSES
Quality Assurance: International Benchmarking for Higher Education

By

Dr. Vanchai Sirichana

Permanent Secretary for University Affairs of Thailand

It is my delight to be able to present a keynote on 'Quality Assurance: International Benchmarking for Higher Education' today. The attendance to this very first international conference the Ministry of University Affairs has organized on this crucial theme has far exceeded our expectations. It truly demonstrates our world's keen interest and belief in the prime importance of quality improvement of our higher education.

My presentation will include four main topics which are principles of quality assurance, desirable directions for international benchmarking, difficulties to be overcome, and apex of the attempts.

For the first topic on principles of quality assurance, I would like to emphasize the importance of voluntary decision, tailor-made system, key component inclusiveness, and external involvement.

When mentioning about quality, we have seen quite a few definitions. The recent July issue of the journal *Quality in Higher Education* has mentioned six meanings. According to Lee Harvey and Peter Knight, quality is something exceptional, perfection or consistency, value for money, fitness for purpose, and transformation while Dorothy Lander has provided the concept of quality as service. No matter what definition is adopted, it is evident that the globalization era with speedy movements of changes and intense competition, quality is a must. A system has to be put in place to ensure quality. Any form of system established is to build up confidence in the quality of our graduates and higher education institutions at the level satisfactory to the needs of individuals, workplaces and communities. Whether the QA process is adopted or not depends very largely on the people and parties concerned since the necessity to take up the tasks is based on voluntary decision. It should be emphasized that choice voluntarily made will have a higher tendency to get support mechanisms to increase the level of success of the overall implementation.

To come up with the decision, several key questions need to primarily be raised: Are we confident in our higher education provision? If yes, do we want to be even more confident? If no, are we ready to take up a quality assurance system? If yes, we could move on to the next step. If no, be sure we stay content with the glory, of the status quo.
The questions would sound to many, very simple, yet the implications are enormous. The word 'we' has to be clearly defined. Looking at the process of quality assurance, 'we' means the stakeholders of the institutions who are directly and indirectly involved in the process. Further elaboration needs to be made to make sure that the 'we' is well covered with mutual acceptance and agreement to go ahead collectively with the implementation of the quality assurance. The actual procedure is another long story.

I now come to the second principle of a tailor-made system. The one word of 'confident' in the questions mentioned earlier brings out a key issue of 'intensity' as simply a sophisticated assessment to measure its abstractness is not sufficient. The degree of satisfaction of the 'confidence' means differently from person to person, institution to institution and country to country. The most crucial dimension I wish to point out is that each university community, has its own 'corporate culture' stemming from philosophy, physical and academic environments. Institutions have thus accumulated diverse experiences and nurtured their own ways of thinking, working and determining their satisfactory degree of confidence. I therefore stress the importance of a tailor-made system for each institution, a system that contains standards well-accepted by partners within and outside the institution circle.

One more implication that should be brought in for discussion here is the role of governments. Is the choice of the word 'we' intended to part the institutions from the authorities concerned? In many cases, universities treasure their academic freedom and autonomy to the extent that the governments' involvement centres on policies and funding. In Thailand, we have a saying to caution the parents 'Build the house upon the wish of dwellers'. The parents have the vital role in helping invest in the house building by supplying designs and required materials and equipment. They would also provide some budget to furnish the house as seen appropriate. No one would want to see a house which is 'catalogue architecture'. Likewise the 'catalogue quality assurance system' is far from desirable.

In terms of management, it is up to each family to make the place safe and homey. Many times, it demands leadership of the head of the family and at all times the unity of the members, though parents' funding support is always seen as preferable while advice, not command, is appreciated. Hence, the governments should have a role to encourage the implementation by setting models of good practices, providing funding, and advice. The key player is the universities themselves to go through their own process of 'soul searching' to come up with the best system possible.

When an institution has made up its mind to go for a quality assurance system, it has the responsibility to carefully select relevant components for the standards set for measurability and accountability. I refer to my third principle 'key component inclusiveness'. In case of Thailand, the Ministry of University Affairs has provided the universities with nine key indicators of higher education quality. They are philosophy, mission, purposes and work plan; teaching-learning process; student development activities; research; academic services to the society; preservation of art and culture; administration and management; financing; and quality assurance system and mechanisms. Universities are expected to determine other related aspects most applicable to their own situations and requirements. They are also encouraged to learn and share more about the experiences with their local and overseas counterparts for the most complete picture of the quality assurance process.
While the soul-searching process is being undertaken, it is of utmost benefits to be aware of the true value of external agency involvement. This can be seen at two levels. With other counterparts, they are able to do the knowledge and experience sharing. By bringing in neutral professional assessors and auditors to the circle, the universities will gain deeper understanding of quality improvement through objective views and advice. It should be pointed out that the external party must also understand the institutional nature and its management and academic standing. At the same time, the universities have to accept the criteria and work procedures of the accreditation bodies, enabling both sides to reach the objectives of the exercise.

One baseline fact, nevertheless, is that acceptance of studies and degrees can never be realized unless quality assurance system is in place and recognized among higher education institutions in the regional and international communities.

May I now touch on the desirable directions for international benchmarking? In Asia and the Pacific, *Asiaweek* has stirred attention and frustration of higher education policy makers and administrators. Despite the facts that some of the indicators selected might not be applicable, the ranking has opened up another avenue of challenges in higher education in which quality is the central concern. *Asiaweek* could also serve as a catalyst for countries to step up their efforts and in my view, some of the issues are worth listening to.

Each country, having its own quality assurance system in one form or another, should then be made to come up with benchmarks to be used as references to improve the performances of each institution. The United Kingdom has had highly admirable achievements that I wish to leave for our honourable Prof. Sir Brian Fender who is the next speaker to kindly cite as examples and models.

The long experience of companies and higher education institutions in the United States is another valuable source. According to Rhonda Martin Epper in the article ‘Applying Benchmarking to Higher Education’ published in *Change* the November/December 1999 issue, the American Productivity & Quality Center (APQC) has developed a consortium benchmarking methodology. Institutions with common interest to improve their performance in one particular area work side by side to identify best practices and learn what they want to improve as a group.

Also commendable is Australia's manual for Australian universities, comprising sets of benchmarks with an extensive coverage of areas the universities see important. The manual could be used in many different ways, as an example of why and how benchmarking is taken up and how the collective efforts of universities have contributed meaningfully to individual and the whole higher education system of the country.

It is indeed interesting to make use of their expertise to gain insights of their experiences and perspectives, enhancing our understanding of quality assessors’ viewpoints and positions in order to enhance our respective national and institutional development. Another dimension to be gained is the projection of the world trends as quite a few countries are so far ahead.
I believe that it is of mutual benefit if each region could work together to set up a regional QA system and its own benchmarking with understanding of other regional thinking patterns and implementation. In addition to the extensive communication and exchanges of diverse practices, exchanges of 'peers' need to be promoted. It is a human nature to compare oneself to one's peers who could gradually place on their partners the 'peer pressure' for self-improvement. This will positively result in heightening quality of education to the level that they will accept one another's system, standard, agree to enter mutual recognition in areas most ready for the purpose and be able to move around to study with credits earned from different institutions all over the world. I think we could declare the efforts a success when institutions and countries are able to perform according to their benchmarks which have been set by benchmarking with other institutions and countries. To aim higher, we need to be able to benchmark our region with others.

Ladies and gentlemen, dreams are always beautiful but could easily be turned into nightmares once we are back to reality and see that stages of development of higher education in countries and regions vary. Many are faced with different constraints and shortcomings while others cry for awareness and commitments of governments and university administrators. The process of benchmarking and quality assurance is both challenging and expensive in terms of funding, time and energy.

Furthermore, greater physical mobility and advanced technology have created new movements. Investment in setting up a branch campus in foreign countries is increasingly made. The mode of instruction employing full-fledged technology for virtual education has also gained popularity. The issue of quality assurance consequently has to be carefully addressed.

While many countries are still striving to provide access opportunities to basic education, many foreign institutions of higher learning have excelled to the extent that they are ready to expand their education turf in a different country. Many, nations have been struggling to build classrooms and to train teachers, let alone hi-tech equipment. On the other end, distance education programmes have sprung out in full bloom. Such sharp differences have clearly demonstrated the 'digital divide' problems. Doubts also spread beyond frontiers. We are not only confronted with the quality of main campus vs overseas branch campus instruction, but also traditional vs virtual education. What could make us feel confident in the education services we get'? Anything other than quality? I think not.

I believe that dreams create hope and hope carries with it willpower for us to move head-on. Close cooperation of countries within the same region must be promoted to concertedly cope with the issues of quality. In North America and Europe, we see strong commitment in pursuing quality improvement in higher education through publications, professional gatherings and extensive and systematic exchanges of peers. The apex of our attempts of the Asia and the Pacific region is to be able to create a pool of experts who serve as regional quality assessors or auditors. Before then, we need to learn more from one another in the region with increased sharing of knowledge and experiences from international QA professionals. Besides, the governments have to play a role, showing their leadership, political will and support to regional benchmarking efforts. Sets of common indicators should be determined to be used as basic minimum requirements for countries and regions to work on. This conference, I hope, will be another forum to ignite our spirit of regional cooperation on this important dimension of higher education.
Finally, I could not help but state strongly, that quality and benchmarking issues are to be left for each country and institutions to decide to determine their own future. However in this one world of ours, we all will actually be even more closely connected, sharing the best and bitterness together. Should we agree that the quality assurance issue is becoming a 'do or die' matter, let us act! so as to avoid seeing the pain of the losers who would be left with memories of the beauty of past glories. The losers could be not just one single country or region but the massacre of the world's higher education.
Standards for Quality Assurance

By

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Introduction

It is my honour and pleasure to have the opportunity to share, with this gathering of distinguished educators and administrators, some of my thoughts and experiences at the National University of Singapore (NUS) related to quality assurance in higher education. In preparing for this address, I am mindful of the fact that what has happened or is being planned for NUS is not necessarily all applicable or even relevant to individual members of the audience, owing to our diverse heritage as well as the different environments in which various institutions of higher education operate. Nevertheless, we all gain from referring to and learning from each other's views and experiences, and new insights and useful practices can always evolve from exchanges on occasions like this.

Let me first give a little background on how NUS has developed in tandem with Singapore’s progress and economic transformation. Some statistics over a ten-year time frame will give a good picture. In September this year, 5,793 undergraduates received their degrees, which was a 45 per cent increase over the degree recipients in 1990. For Masters and PhDs, there were 2,417 degree recipients representing a six-fold increase over the degrees awarded in 1990. These trends clearly reflect the rate at which NUS is growing, with graduate studies and research propelling the institution toward a ‘first world’ status.

As the leading institution of higher learning in Singapore, NUS is aware of its role as the standard-bearer for higher education in the country. Although quality in higher education may be viewed from various angles, I shall give a broad overview of the subject from our perspective, followed by an outline of some specific measures that have been in place which have helped made NUS achieve its present status. My purpose is to share our visions and strategic thrusts for quality specific to the circumstances of NUS, rather than to prescribe generic norms or procedures for institutions of higher education. Indeed this approach is akin to a case study, based on which guiding principles and conclusions may be drawn for applications in other institutions in other specific circumstances.
Strategic Initiatives for Quality

The Role of NUS

As Singapore begins to shift from an industrial to a knowledge-based and information-intensive society, the university has a critical role to play in creating knowledge, nurturing talent and spearheading innovation. NUS considers all these endeavors its prime responsibility in the new millennium. I will now describe the broad strategies that we use to this end.

Internal Measures: Quality in a Balanced Education

Each year NUS admits a large number of students - this year about six thousand - with a broad spectrum of abilities and with different aspirations. We aim for a balance of breadth and depth in their university experience so that when they leave us, they are well prepared for life's adventure. We aim to produce graduates who have the habits and enthusiasm for lifelong learning, leading to discovery, creation and application of knowledge. The extent to which this is achieved is certainly a critical measure of the quality of education at NUS, not how well the students fare in the examinations or how many facts they are acquainted with in the process.

As I said, no prescriptive measures can be given to assure quality. On the other hand, programmes can be drawn up to consciously cultivate quality. Some examples are as follows:

(i) General Education Requirement (GER)

Beginning July 2001, NUS will introduce an undergraduate General Education Requirement (GER) in six faculties: Arts and Social Sciences, Business Administration, Computing, Design and Environment, Engineering and Science. This requirement is designed to broaden students’ intellectual horizons, to develop critical and creativity thinking skills for independent learning, and to promote spoken and written articulateness.

It is important to note that intellectual broadening does not imply mediocrity, lowering of educational standards, and producing graduates who are Jacks-of-all-trades and masters of none. Indeed, to graduate, a student must still fulfill high academic requirements in his major.

(ii) Special Challenging Modules

In line with our educational philosophy, we should think beyond setting an expedient common denominator for our students. It is important to recognize that each student is different. Each comes with different abilities and aspirations. Each must be intellectually stretched to realize his/her highest potential.
Our faculties will aim to offer special challenging modules (which are called honours modules in the US), designed to stretch students’ intellectual abilities to the fullest. Students taking these modules during their course of studies can graduate with the highest NUS honors.

(iii) University Scholars Programme (USP)

In July 2001, NUS will launch the University Scholars Program. This programme is inspired by the college system in leading North American and British universities. Students in this programme will be exposed to the rich educational opportunities in NUS, and will be allowed to achieve intellectual broadening across disciplines with flexibility in designing their own majors. The participating faculties are Arts and Social Sciences, Business Administration, Computing, Engineering and Science. In time to come, this will be extended to other faculties.

The USP is a four-year Honours Program. It is targeted at the best and the brightest. These students will be admitted to NUS through a common admission system. At entry, they do not have to commit themselves to any of the participating faculties. Instead, they will have the freedom to experience a broad array of both general and discipline-specific modules of their choice, based on their interests and abilities. The formal declaration of choice of faculty and majors can be made between the third and fourth semester. We have also set a goal of giving these students a one-year immersion in leading overseas universities.

(iv) Institute of the Arts

The newly announced Institute of the Arts at NUS will add to our full spectrum of disciplines and enhance the diversity of courses offered. The combination of the ITA and the University Cultural Centre provides rich opportunities for our artistic talents to flourish in NUS. It will prepare NUS talents to venture outside Singapore, taking our unique cultural offerings to an international audience. This exchange will also bring the cultures of different countries onto our campus thereby enhancing NUS as a global institution.

Now that the performing arts will be an integral part of this University, new opportunities will be created for all our students in their pursuit of a balanced, holistic educational experience.

External Measures: Leveraging on the Best Universities

For NUS to compete with the best, we first have to learn from the best universities in the world. We note that these institutions are rapidly breaking down structural and disciplinary divides, and dismantling outdated departments. At the same time, they are developing core competencies and distinctive strengths – the building blocks of vibrant multi-disciplinary programmes. The best universities have come to the realization that today’s breakthroughs require clever combinations of the methods, approaches and tools of different disciplines. They have also realized that traditional ways of teaching and research, through isolated academic disciplines, may hinder discovery and learning. More and more, these universities are becoming communities without intellectual and geographical borders.
In light of this, NUS must concentrate its resources and human talent on things that NUS can do particularly well. NUS must find its intellectual niches, select its areas of excellence and then leverage on these to create partnerships with leading overseas universities.

Some examples of strategic alliances are the Singapore-MIT alliance in engineering and computer science, NUS-Johns Hopkins collaboration in medical sciences and the NUS-Georgia Tech partnership in logistics.

These are microcosms of a global knowledge community where faculty members from the participating universities in science, engineering, medicine and computing carry out joint teaching and research. These programmes have drawn the best students from all over the world; the promising results so far do give encouragement to the proactive creation of more international linkages from now on.

Quality Assurance Schemes

I will now turn back somewhat, chronologically, to describe some existing schemes and practices of quality assurance that have earned NUS its current reputation in maintaining high standards. These will be explained in three categories:

- Teaching and learning
- Research
- Staff management

**Quality Assurance in Teaching and Learning**

*(i) Feedback on Education Processes*

Inasmuch as students are the primary reason for the existence of institutions of higher education, a system to generate feedback and assess the processes of design, development and delivery of curriculum is central to an institution's quality assurance system. Such feedback is critical to the validation and refinement of the core teaching and learning processes.
Some instruments of feedback and improvement at NUS are as follows:

- Student feedback
- Peer Review
- Video Recording of Lectures
- Employers and Alumni Feedback
- Department Consultative Committees

Student feedback on the quality of teaching has been a core practice for more than a decade now. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students participate in end-of-course surveys and provide critiques on a course and the faculty member responsible. The information obtained is used to drive teaching effectiveness and subject matter relevancy.

Peer reviews provide staff with the benefit of constructive feedback on teaching styles and techniques offered by experienced faculty members observing lectures and tutorials personally.

The teaching faculty is encouraged to have their lectures video-taped for follow-up assessments of lecturing style. Such tapes can also be given voluntarily to Department Heads to evaluate the quality of teaching of faculty members.

Employers and alumni provide another source input for curriculum design and professional training. Their views and expectations are regularly solicited through a myriad of surveys.

Department Consultative Committees comprise the department management team and representatives from relevant government agencies and individuals. These committees meet regularly to assure that the curriculum is kept abreast of developments outside academia, as well as to inform academics the expectations of employers and society of our graduates.

(ii) Boards of Examiners

A comprehensive university such as NUS must assure that there is some balance and compatibility in the award of various classes of qualifications among the various programmes of study.

Boards of Examiners meet to moderate the examination scores and determine the different classes of Honours to be assigned to graduates. Recommendations for prizes, medals and other awards are also deliberated on at such meetings.

(iii) Assessment by Professional Bodies

As a supplier of skilled manpower to the country, the involvement of and accreditation by industry, as represented by the appropriate professional institutions, provide an element of endorsement of our teaching programmes.
At NUS, faculties offering professional degrees, for example Engineering, Architecture, Medicine and Dentistry, regularly have their programmes assessed externally by the relevant international professional institutions. Another example is the School of Computing, which has its curriculum regularly updated according the recommendations of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) in the United States. This practice provides another level of assurance that academic standards are current and acceptable on a global basis.

(iv) External Examiners

A first-rate institution has to demonstrate the international recognition of its degrees. An External Examiners system is used at NUS in which senior academics from reputable overseas universities are appointed to scrutinize examination papers; they also visit the respective departments at least once in a two-year term, sit in at project presentations and examine marked scripts and theses.

Apart from ensuring that our academic programmes are maintained at a high international standard, the external examiners also advise the faculty on matters relating to teaching and curriculum design to ensure that the desired level of quality is defined, monitored and maintained.

As for graduate degrees, a thesis must be examined by external examiners before the oral defense is called. Such elaborate arrangement ensures that international standards are kept and there is no danger of intellectual inbreeding - given the very small number of institutions of higher learning in Singapore, especially for the professional disciplines.

Quality Assurance in Research

Apart from teaching excellence, the other pillar of a world-class institution must be its research. I shall outline some current mechanisms by which NUS maintains the quality of its research activities.

(i) International Academic Advisory Panels

To ensure that research activities keep abreast of the latest developments and are aligned with internationally accepted norms, a panel of international advisors is established in each Faculty. Members of the panel would comprise renowned academics in specialized fields. The panel is charged with the responsibility to review research output and advise on directions for research. The panel visits NUS on an average of once in two years. Apart from subjecting the faculty’s research areas to careful scrutiny, the close interaction that follows between panel members and faculty staff often creates a much-valued synergy and impetus of ideas for future research.
(ii) Research Project Evaluation

Being funded and supported primarily by the government, NUS practises a high level of financial prudence, especially in research. A system is in place to evaluate project proposals submitted for research funding. Depending on the decision arrived at, the source of funding can be either from the university research budget or externally from various government agencies as well as industry. A project proposal requesting a grant higher than some threshold amount would be subjected to an external and independent review as well. All these levels of scrutiny are co-ordinated by the university's Office of Research and Graduate Studies.

For continuing funding, researchers are required to submit regular progress reports on their projects. Management committees critique these reports and a decision is reached to determine if a given project continues to be viable. Key indicators of good research output include the number of patents filed, research papers published in refereed journals of good standing, and the impact of research findings.

(iii) Assessment of Research Publications

Standards for quality assurance of research publications are most appropriately determined and set at the faculty and even department level.

At NUS, the current system involves the compilation of a list of high quality and well-recognized international and regional refereed journals in a given field of research. This list is constantly reviewed and updated, with some faculties even taking the extra effort to seek views and comments from overseas experts on the accuracy of their lists. The list is then distributed to faculty members who in turn are encouraged to submit their research findings for publication in top-tier journals.

In a field such as Computer Science where constant generation of conference papers arising from rapid advances in the field is the norm, the department may also set an internal standard by ranking conferences based on quality and reputation. This, however, is undertaken in conjunction with inputs from leading researchers in various fields.

Quality Assurance in Staff Management

I have touched on quality in teaching and research. I shall now move on to a third pillar of institutional excellence, namely the management and development of its people. Due in part to the nature of this conference and in part to the time constraint, I shall confine my discussion to faculty members.
(i) Recruitment of Faculty

The procedure in recruiting faculty members must have built-in checks to ensure that only applicants of good quality are shortlisted for final consideration and eventual appointment. Such measures include

- Commissioning of search committees for more senior staff appointments
- Comments from faculty members and external referees working in the field and
- Invitation of applicants to travel, expenses paid, to NUS to present seminars and hold discussions with faculty and staff, and to get a feel of the working environment.

(ii) Performance Review

The annual assessment of faculty members is an integral element of a system to assure a high quality of teaching, research and administration. It is used as a formal means to determine if a faculty member is suitable for salary adjustment or promotion.

During each assessment, each faculty member is required to complete a set of documents highlighting the member's contributions to teaching, research and administration; member's immediate supervisor – usually the head of department – conducts an informal interview to discuss member's performance and where necessary, to counsel and advise should there be areas for improvement.

At the faculty level, a committee comprising senior faculty members and chaired by the Dean review nominations from the departments to make decisions and its recommendations to the university administration.

For full Professorship promotion or tenure considerations, external reviews are also invited from a panel of referees who must themselves be renowned in the same field as the candidate. Although this is time-consuming, it is a standard of quality assurance that ensures that only candidates of the best quality are bestowed high levels of appointment.

A new system is being developed in which elements of market value of a faculty member, in addition to his/her personal contributions to the university beyond regular duties, will constitute a substantial portion of the salary package. In this way the outdated 'civil service' mentality and reward system will be replaced by keenness on the part of the faculty to excel and perform the best.

Concluding Remarks

I have given a broad summary of the various systems and procedures at NUS, both those in the process of being developed and those that have been in place, that form the basis of quality assurance of the university's activities. They have been evolved over time, and will continue to be fine-tuned as requirements change.
As academic standards know no national boundaries in this age of instant and global communication, institutions will now be judged by the highest expectations. Self-assessments and external assessments will increasingly take on an international scale, and the sooner an institution acquires a global perspective and embraces the needed changes, the firmer would be its footing in terms of quality assurance. Indeed in this light, NUS is in the midst of changing its curriculum, examination system, faculty development, and even its academic calendar.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I treasure very much this opportunity to exchange our experience with peers from many countries; there is much for us to learn from each other as we prepare ourselves for the multitude of challenges and demands in the new millennium.
Mechanisms for Quality Assurance: the intersection of national and institutional perspectives on quality assurance

By

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Introduction

While I do not represent the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) of the UK, I shall not be able to ignore the QAA dimension in speaking to you about ‘mechanisms for quality assurance’ from a UK perspective. Nobody currently working in quality assurance within UK higher education could afford to do this. The QAA is a significant national ‘player’ in UK higher education. Indeed, as many of you will know, it has also acquired an international presence. Not only is it an active participant in the INQAAHE, but, in a more direct sense, it has taken the activity and focus of quality assurance in UK higher education literally across borders and across continents through its ‘quality audit’ of collaborative programmes offered through partnership arrangements by UK universities to students studying in their own countries. Inside the UK, the QAA - and its predecessor national bodies in the 1990s - have demonstrably altered the contours of the landscape of higher education.

The Changing Landscape for Quality Assurance

My particular theme - the intersection of national and institutional agendas for quality assurance - gives me an opportunity to reflect on the experience of working with national quality assurance bodies (the immediate predecessors of the QAA) for most of the 1990s, and then more recently with a university. From my university’s perspective, the quality assurance terrain in which we operate, the organisational landmarks, the signposts and the communication routes all show distinct traces of the presence of the QAA. It is not the only national body with a concern for quality assurance in higher education. The funding councils for higher education and a large number of professional and occupational bodies also have a keen interest. But it is probably the most visible in putting its stamp on approaches to quality assurance. Its mission is
to promote public confidence that the quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced.

There are some key words here may resonate with you: public confidence, safeguarding and enhancement of standards.

A part of what I want to say concerns how we define, and who defines, the agenda for quality assurance and the objectives to which our quality assurance mechanisms are directed. A central theme in the development of quality assurance arrangements in UK higher education over the last 10 years has been one of public confidence in, and university and college accountability to the wider public for, higher education. The concept of the ‘public’ extends well beyond the immediate teaching and learning community of one’s own university/college. As you will recognise in your own institutional and national settings, ‘public confidence’ encompasses a range of important groups and demands. Many of these are familiar to us all: the financial, economic and social investment represented by governments and brokered through higher education funding bodies; the ‘stake’ represented by taxpayers and parents; the expectations and requirements of employers; and, of course, the hopes and dreams of those who invest their time and personal aspirations in higher education - the students themselves.

It would be wrong to cite QAA’s mission of promoting public confidence in higher education as indicative of a loss of confidence in higher education in the UK. Rather, I think that most would agree that promoting confidence in higher education has as much to do with improving the way in which we communicate its value, purpose and content, especially in relation to changing social and economic goals, as it has with the actual quality of teaching and learning.

Experience of Quality Assurance from an Institutional Perspective

The quality assurance mechanisms which I shall comment upon in this paper have attempted to address the various, and variously assumed, requirements, concerns and expectations of these groups. We should not underestimate the impact which the demands of quality assurance now make on our daily professional lives. The seemingly intimate world of the scholar/teacher/student is almost now unrecognisable in the complex organisational landscape of mass higher education where external accountabilities are ever present, and ever pressing.

For the 170 universities and colleges of higher education in the UK, the last decade of the twentieth century has seen serious and sustained attention to academic quality assurance. Successive national quality assurance initiatives have had a significant and visible impact on universities’ and colleges’ internal structures and arrangements. Procedures for programme approval, monitoring and review, for staff and teaching appraisal, and for obtaining student feedback are commonplace; we have grown used to documenting and sign-posting quality assurance activity for external consumption; academic and administrative skills have been applied industriously to the task of critical review and self-assessment; there is a widespread preoccupation with providing and testing ‘evidence’ that quality and standards are being attended to. The rhythm of university life, the annual committee and academic calendar and the priorities of senior institutional managers are all visibly affected. Gearing up for, or (less productively) winding down from, the latest engagement with external quality assurance (be this QAA institutional audit and subject review; professional body accreditation; or the funding councils’ research assessment exercise) takes up increasing amounts of institutional
time and energy. Considerable effort is now invested by all of us in ensuring that one’s university gains maximum benefit from - or minimises the risk of unavoidable exposure to - external scrutiny.

The ‘rewards’ or ‘penalties’ can be significant, especially in attracting or keeping students and staff. The popular face of quality assurance in the UK is the league table (or, increasingly, league tables) constructed with ever more imaginative use of indicators to convey a more favourable impression of one’s own institution’s standing, or to weaken the toe-hold of one’s competitors). While we would like to dismiss league tables as misleading, inaccurate or incomplete, they cannot be entirely ignored by institutions. And we believe that they are scrutinised with interest from outside the UK.

The intersection of national and institutional concerns in quality assurance in higher education is thus not only of interest to historians, educational sociologists and educational journalists. Many of us have a practical professional interest in the effect of all this activity on our institutions.

My University, for example, has over 25,000 students, of whom 4,000 are postgraduate, it offers a large number of awards and programmes, hosts thirty research centres and has a wide range of consultancy activities which involve the University in collaboration with local, regional and national organisations, and a number of international partnerships. It is strongly committed to maintaining and enhancing its local and regional standing, and its place in the national and international market for higher education. The resources we devote as an institution to quality assurance have therefore to be wisely spent and our mechanisms and arrangements well-chosen to reflect our particular mission and goals. One consequence of the dominance of the national agenda over the last few years has been the rather limited scope for (or at least as experienced by) institutions to adapt their quality assurance arrangements to serve particular institutional as well as national objectives.

I am very much aware that this conference is concerned chiefly with issues and arrangements for quality assurance in Thailand and Southeast Asia, drawing on relevant activities and experience from elsewhere in the world. Any contribution I can make to your discussion will perhaps be in the perspective I bring from, as it were, having looked down both ends of the quality assurance telescope - viewing the wider picture of a rapidly developing national system for quality assurance, and, in closer focus, the picture from within a university of responding to the challenge from the ‘other side’.
I spotted the following complaint recently in my daily newspaper (under a sub-editor’s headline ‘the suffering professionals’) from a Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics:

>The present system .. (i.e. of QAA teaching quality assessment) is an institutionalised form of contempt; it supposes that, left to ourselves, we won’t keep our houses in order.

The quotation is useful in pointing up the strength of feeling about ‘institutionalised contempt’ which has beset the development of more systematic approaches to quality assurance in UK higher education. That ‘contempt’ has been felt at two levels: by institutions in response to the onset of external quality audits of universities and colleges from the early 1990s; and by academic staff when invited by their institutional managers to provide evidence (not merely by assertion of professional standing) of attention being paid to quality and standards.

A Brief Excursion through the 1990s

A brief excursion into the recent past will help to point up some of the key features of our attempts to achieve a workable balance between national and institutional preoccupations in quality assurance. You may find some aspects of your own debates echoing through our experiences of the last decade.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the ‘binary’ line between the (then) universities and the (then) polytechnics was also a line which bisected traditions of quality assurance (although the term was scarcely used then). In the 1980s, I had been a Registrar with the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) - an interesting example (possibly remembered by colleagues from Hong Kong) of a national agency effectively acting as a regulator of quality and standards of degree education for the polytechnics. CNAA had two distinct roles:

• as the awarding body (the CNAA degree) for all degrees for which students qualified by completing programmes in polytechnics which were not empowered to award their own degrees

• as a national quality assurance body whose rigorous and peer-based system for course validation and approval influenced the quality assurance mechanisms in all the polytechnics. This tradition of explicit (if rather process-oriented approach) to quality and standards endured in these institutions well after they became universities in 1992.

Although CNAA had itself drawn on the expertise of university staff in approving and reviewing polytechnic standards and quality, the ‘old’ (pre-1992) universities had, for the most part, and with the exception of the system of external examiners, eschewed more formal
arrangements for quality assurance. However, increasing university apprehension at the possibility that the Conservative government of the day might put university claims of self-regulation to the test, led to universities, somewhat to the surprise and consternation of some of their number, to agree to establish their own modest form of voluntary external review. Thus the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) created the Academic Audit Unit (AAU) in 1990 to deflect government scepticism about the ability and willingness of universities to demonstrate their accountability for quality and standards.

I moved from CNAA to help Peter Williams, as Director, to set up the AAU. It proved to be an extremely interesting but short-lived experiment to graft an external quasi-independent form of external review on to a highly decentralised and diverse sector where the prevailing culture was then somewhat hostile, or at best indifferent to, external quality assurance. The AAU completed some twenty quality audits of universities, and it succeeded in increasing awareness of, and staff exposure to, the challenge of systematic quality assurance by drawing senior university academic staff and administrators as auditors into external quality assurance. Audit teams were not distant inspectors; they were more or less recognisable as peers to those being audited. The AAU also brought a new style of operation - which the CNAA had not adopted - of publishing its reports on the outcome of quality audits of universities. These reports were not best sellers; but they were placed in the public domain. QAA’s current practice of putting its reports of subject and institutional reviews of universities and colleges on the Internet to reach a wide and diverse audience has followed and expanded this practice. However, the AAU was short-lived. It was overtaken in 1992 by the pace of institutional change and the government’s desire to enable higher education to respond more effectively to the rapid expansion in student numbers. The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act played a key role in speeding up the development and acceptance of a national quality assurance agenda. The Act designated some twenty new universities (from the ex polytechnics), and created a common mechanism (the higher education funding councils for England, Scotland and Wales) to channel state funds to all higher education institutions. As a quid pro quo for the doubling of the size of the university sector, the Act also required all universities and colleges of higher education to be subject to a common external quality assurance regime. The Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) was established for this purpose, funded not by government but by all UK universities and colleges acting in concert to provide a mechanism for quality assurance which would work with rather than against the grain of institutional autonomy.

The HEQC developed a distinctive, two-pronged approach to quality assurance which from the outset was aimed (not wholly successfully) at reassuring the institutional sceptics who were wary of the negative repercussions, particularly in the international market, of public reporting of the strengths and weaknesses of quality assurance in UK higher education. The approach involved:
• periodic quality audit of institutions’ quality management arrangements, based upon an institution’s self-evaluation of the effectiveness of its quality assurance arrangements;

• support and encouragement for institutions to improve quality through research and development work, mainly linked to the findings from audits and responding to institutionally-defined problems.

This national picture was further complicated by the new higher education funding arrangements and the government’s keenness to ensure that all publicly funded bodies were made fully accountable for the quality and value for money of the products and services for which they were responsible. In higher education this keenness led to the higher education funding councils, as the major dispensers of public funds, being given a new statutory responsibility for assessing the quality of the 'provision' which they funded. The funding councils decided that they needed to develop their own separate procedures for the external assessment of subjects in all higher education institutions. This resulted in a rather messy situation - one which institutions found increasingly awkward to manage and which was almost impossible to explain to visitors to the UK.

Thus, between 1992 and 1997, universities and colleges had to gear their internal procedures to meet the separate (and not necessarily co-ordinated) external requirements of HEQC (responsible for the audit of an institution’s quality management) and of the funding councils (responsible for subject/programme assessment). Additional frustration came with the desire of the funding councils (reflecting government interest in providing simple, readily understood information about quality to the public) to assess quality on a differential scale (excellent/satisfactory/unsatisfactory) while HEQC continued to maintain that single, categorical measures of the effectiveness of an institution’s quality assurance systems were over simplifications and would mislead rather than inform the general public.

After a five year programme of national quality assessment of subjects and programmes, the vast majority of subjects were found by the ‘teaching quality assessment’ procedure of the funding councils to be ‘satisfactory’ or better. Indeed, as you may also find, the onset in the UK of any new national mechanism for quality review or assessment has proved to be fertile ground for consultants offering their training and development programmes to institutions to help them ‘beat the assessors at their own game’.

Establishment of the Quality Assurance Agency

By 1997, and certainly as viewed from the perspective of institutions, the arena for national quality assurance was beginning to feel very crowded. Not surprisingly, the combined effect of these processes (not forgetting the considerable demands placed on UK universities from the parallel research assessment exercise and the accreditation requirements of professional bodies) led to howls of anguish from many institutions. The outcome, after some hesitation and prolonged consultation, was the creation in 1997 of the QAA with a brief to bring the mechanisms for external review of ‘institutions’ quality management systems and the external quality assessment of subjects/programmes under a single organisational umbrella.
The Quality Assurance Agency describes its ‘core business:

as reviewing the quality and standards of higher education in universities and colleges … by auditing institutional arrangements for managing quality and standards (including for collaboration with overseas partners) and by assessing the quality and standards of teaching and learning at subject level.

Like its predecessors, it is independent of government and is funded by subscriptions from all universities and colleges of higher education in the UK. It maintains a link with the funding councils and with the ‘representative bodies’ for universities and colleges (as for example the CVCP) through separate ‘service’ contracts which specify the reports and judgements which the Agency will publish on individual institutions and on sector-wide matters.

With the establishment of QAA in 1997, I moved to the University of the West of England, Bristol. My position as Academic Secretary has afforded ample opportunity to experience the trials, tribulations as well as observing the benefits to institutional processes of engaging with national quality assurance arrangements.

Lessons from the Front

What then have we learned from these attempts to come to terms with quality assurance in a fast-moving and changing world for higher education? What might be of interest to you - either to adapt or to avoid?

The first general point to make is that almost all universities and colleges have now set up procedures with an explicit quality assurance purpose. They vary in their coverage and effectiveness. For some (for example, ex CNAA institutions, including my own) procedures which were originally designed in accordance with an external model have been ‘internalised’ and gradually reshaped to engage with external audit/subject review procedures requiring evidence of effective self-evaluation as a demonstration of institutional maturity. For universities which had had relatively little experience of ‘external’ intrusion into their ‘private’ professional domains, the experience of exposing internal decision-making and often ill-defined processes to external peer scrutiny has been salutary. In some instances, the mere prospect of such external encounters has been sufficient to prompt self-questioning and prepared the ground for more systematic consideration of what is meant by quality and standards in the teaching and learning relationship.
In sum, the changing national agenda has brought a particular slant to the quality assurance debates inside institutions. In particular, it has questioned:

- how quality in higher education is defined, measured, secured and enhanced
- how academic standards are set and maintained by institutions and communicated to the wider community through the qualifications awarded by them;

- how processes for the assurance and accountability for quality and standards can respond to the requirements and expectations of mass higher education, to changing employment patterns and enable higher education to justify its continuing claim on the public purse; and

- the relevance of concepts such as ‘consumer protection’ and ‘equality of opportunity’ to mechanisms for quality assurance given the rising cost of higher education to individuals.

In response to these challenges, institutions have developed a range of quality assurance mechanisms which operate at different levels for different purposes. The principal and most widespread of these are illustrated in Table 1.

### Table 1
**Quality Assurance Mechanisms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Institutional QA procedure</th>
<th>QA process</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>explicit quality audit and</td>
<td>- internal ‘academic audit’</td>
<td>review</td>
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<tr>
<td>quality management</td>
<td>- institution-wide self</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>analysis (the ‘analytical account’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>standard setting</td>
<td>- award/programme validation and approval</td>
<td>QAA subject review</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- QAA subject review</td>
<td>professional body accreditation</td>
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<td>teaching</td>
<td>- staff appraisal</td>
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<td>- observation of teaching</td>
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<td>student learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- annual monitoring</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- external examiners</td>
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Taking my own university as an example, some of these procedures have proved more difficult to manage in practice than others. We had, for example, to work hard in preparation for QAA’s audit of our institutional quality management systems in 1999. While the university has well established mechanisms for programme approval and review, for staff appraisal, and for reviewing learning support services, the task of bringing this review activity together to form a coherent whole and expressing it in a concise self-evaluative document proved to be time consuming and labour intensive. It is tempting to ‘hand the task over’ to a small group to produce a convincing view of the institution as seen from the perspective of senior management. The urge to set out one’s best stall for an external audience is difficult to resist. Yet the real benefit of this exercise is to take stock of one’s own strengths and weaknesses, and to take the opportunity to increase a shared understanding which can lead to change and improvement. No institution is without its problem areas. We found the experience of institutional quality audit helpful, not so much from the week-long exposure of our ‘evidence’ of quality assurance in operation to an external team, as the discipline of undertaking an institution-wide scrutiny of operations in advance of the audit, and the momentum which this and the subsequent (published) audit report gave to own institutional agenda for change.
Returning to the National Perspective

This is a good time, at least in the UK, to reflect on the intersection between national and institutional quality assurance agendas. We are currently in the throes of preparing for QAA’s new process for institution-wide and subject review which comes into operation from 2002. (In the now more visibly multi-national United Kingdom, the new review process has already started in Scotland!). The new process is distinctive in a number of interesting respects. It reflects the outcome of a quite lengthy period of dialogue between the QAA and institutions over the last three to four years, focusing on two key issues:

• how to ‘lighten the burden’ on institutions from external review;
• how to shift the focus of quality assurance more emphatically away from ‘process’ to ‘learning outcomes’ or, put more simply, how are academic standards actually set and maintained.

The new QAA approach rests on an interesting compromise between national and institutional agendas for quality assurance. After a decade of experimentation and change, there is now broad acceptance by universities and colleges of the need for a national framework for quality assurance which acknowledges more explicitly and directly the wider public and socio-economic stake in the quality and standards of teaching, learning and qualifications in higher education.

Quality Assurance Agency: ‘Academic Review’

QAA’s new process of ‘Academic Review’ has the following features:

• it will continue to distinguish between subject and institution-wide levels of quality assurance, but will integrate external procedures more closely with institutions’ internal processes;
• QAA external reviewers will take part in internal subject reviews and gather evidence over time to inform its judgements about an institution’s system-wide arrangements for quality and standards;
• over a six year cycle, QAA will report nationally for each institution on
  • the outcome standards of all its programmes and awards;
  • the quality of students’ learning opportunities; and
  • the effectiveness of its institution-wide management of standards and quality.
There will be no direct financial reward for ‘success’ to institutions. The ‘reward’ for institutions whose internal review and self-evaluation procedures stand up to this scrutiny is the promise of a ‘lighter touch’ from QAA (meaning fewer review visits in the next six-year cycle) and a much less onerous institutional review process. On the other hand, poor reports which challenge the evidence, depth or accuracy of an institution’s self-evaluation will result in a correspondingly heavier QAA visit schedule.

However, perhaps the more significant aspect of the new process - and one which may be of interest outside the UK - is the emergence of a national framework for quality assurance which QAA intends will serve as a common reference point for all universities and colleges. The framework neatly reflects some of the characteristics of the higher education landscape in the UK: it is not supported by any legislative or statutory authority (QAA is funded by universities and colleges, not directly by the government), and the three parts which make up the framework (the Code of Practice, the subject benchmark statements and the National Qualifications Framework) have all been informed by existing practice in universities and colleges and have drawn academic peers and professional body representatives into the drafting process. The framework also bears strong traces of the national debate throughout the 1990s in the UK about the meaning and communication of academic standards within and beyond the higher education community.

**UK-wide Framework for Quality Assurance**

In brief, the framework consists of three separate but related initiatives:

i) a **Code of Practice for Quality Assurance**, described by QAA as a comprehensive Code, covering ‘system-wide’ expectations on all matters related to the assurance of quality and standards for all teaching, learning and related activities. The emphasis of the Code is on ‘precepts’ to which all universities and colleges are expected to adhere, not on detailed procedures (these are expected to vary according to size, mission and context of individual institutions). The Code states what is expected of institutions, not how they are to do it. The Code is being published in sections over a three-year period. Eight sections have already been published.

ii) a set of **subject benchmarking statements** for each of the 41 subject categories within which awards and qualifications are offered by UK universities. The purpose of these statements is not to define a national curriculum for each subject (although institutional scepticism about whether this will emerge in the future remains) but to provide ‘broad statements of the general expectations about standards i.e. the threshold standards in each subject’. So far some 22 subject benchmark statements have been produced. A key decision was taken by QAA at the outset of this work (which has involved about 400 academics from almost 100 universities and colleges) to take the three-year honours degree as the starting point for the benchmark exercise on the grounds that the standards set at this level determine the standards set for sub-degree awards such as Diplomas, and the standards of the postgraduate Master’s qualification.
the establishment of a National Qualifications Framework. This is undoubtedly the most controversial part of the Framework. This is perhaps not surprising given how jealously UK universities have guarded their independence and autonomy as degree awarding bodies. The Qualifications Framework will not replace institutions’ awarding powers, but its existence is likely to have a significant impact upon how UK degrees and other higher education qualifications are seen and understood within and outside the higher education community. In countries where qualifications are regulated by legislation or statute, this step would not be regarded as very dramatic. In the UK, some universities view it with concern and suspicion. However, other institutions see considerable advantages - in the domestic and in the international market - of adopting a clear and consistent structure, and a common language, to describe their qualifications.

The ‘quality assurance’ case advanced by QAA for a Qualifications Framework is that it will improve understanding and communication by:

- accurately ‘mapping’ the standards expected at each qualification level;
- identify progression routes from the lower to higher levels;
- facilitate institutional comparison by providing a common reference point;
- provide students with clearer information about programmes and qualifications;
- and give a clearer picture to employers of what they can expect from a graduate.

The overall framework for quality assurance is not yet fully in place. When it is (by 2002), it will be used to support the new QAA approach to quality assurance by serving as a common reference point for all universities and colleges against which to compare and evaluate their quality assurance operations. It will also help to map the quality and standards thresholds for external reviewers and thereby inform their judgements of institutional practice.
Concluding Remarks

We have, then, come a long way in the last ten years: institutional and national agendas for quality assurance have become ever more closely entwined; and the exposure to different forms of external review and the increased emphasis on demonstrating accountability for quality and standards has undoubtedly had a significant impact on what we in institutions do now, and the way we do it. For many institutions, the experience of being asked the deceptively simple academic audit questions of what are you doing, why are you doing it, how do you know it is the best way, and how do you know it works, has occasionally been an uncomfortable one. But it has also opened up areas for debate and enquiry from which much has already been learned and where we all recognise that more can be done.

One of the most challenging things to get right is the information produced from quality assurance and the ends to which it is put. Information generated from accountability and for enhancement can also - as many of us have found - be used for other purposes. In the UK, the development of national approaches to quality assurance and of ‘quality league tables’ have gone hand in hand. Information about the effectiveness of an institution’s quality assurance arrangements, or indeed its academic standards, is not easy to convey to a wider ‘lay’ public in straightforward terms. Simple descriptive indicators (‘excellent’, ‘approved’) or numerical scores are valued by the press and might seem, at face value, to be helpful to the public. However, they may obscure as much as they reveal. Published reports on quality management and subject assessments need to carry a ‘health warning’ reminding the reader that they are only snapshots in time.

What is surely of greater importance to the student/parent/employer is to see evidence of an institution’s continuing awareness of its responsibilities for quality and standards, of its willingness to compare itself with others and of openness to critical scrutiny. In a system like the UK where there is no formal hierarchy of universities, but a persistent and still persuasive informal ‘ranking’ of institutions, independent and reliable information about quality and standards could put a powerful tool in the hands of the press and public. My university, and others like it, while wary of the danger of oversimplification, nevertheless see this as an opportunity to challenge stereotypes and the values and assumptions about quality and standards which have spilled over from an elite into a mass system of higher education.

From an institutional perspective, I suspect that we have felt the greatest impact from quality assurance mechanisms in two areas: in fleshing out the concept of an institution’s ‘corporate responsibility’ for quality and standards (widely affirmed, but difficult to achieve in practice in a culture favouring individual academic freedom and responsibility); and in devoting more attention to the factors which actually influence quality in teaching and students’ learning.
The environment for institutional quality management and for teaching and learning has changed very rapidly in the last ten years. Many argue that the electronic revolution in communication and information technology will transform our understanding of the university or college as a geographically-grounded teaching and learning institution, and enormously expand the horizons of the learners. We are just beginning to ask ourselves whether our investment so far in quality assurance has prepared us sufficiently for the challenges of the ‘global’ learning environment. Fortunately, the conference organisers have been kind enough not to ask their speakers on this occasion to address this one!
Challenges Facing Universities

After many years during which universities were principally concerned with two purposes – education of a proportion of young people (usually a small proportion, comprising an elite group), and research driven by the interests of the academics – they now face a very substantial increase in the expectations of society and of governments. These increased demands include:

- Mass higher education, with in many cases a recent doubling in the proportion of the 18 to 22 year age group;
- Lifelong learning, including both continuing education for graduates (particularly continuing professional development) and the provision of a 'second chance' for those adults who had not been able to enter higher education at the conventional age;
- Applied research on a much greater scale than before, concerning not only technological issues of an 'Information Age' but also social problems arising from new technologies and a 'Global Market';
- An economic contribution of a direct kind, particularly to the benefit of the community around the university by the creation of new commercial activities and new employment;
- Involvement in the social life of the community with the aim of reducing 'social exclusion'.

Global Forces

Most, if not all, of these greater expectations can be traced to that combination of changes which are producing 'Globalisation'. The main driving force is the rapid and enormous revolution in information and communication technologies (ICTs), which is having dramatic economic, social and cultural impacts throughout the world. A second, and related, factor is the rapid establishment of English as the international language for business and politics as well as higher education. As national governments look more and more to higher education to help their communities become economically and socially successful in a global economy, the very factors which are generating these national demands are also opening a global market for higher education and increasing the level of competition between universities. Furthermore, the new ICTs, in addition to changing the scale of operation of individual universities are having direct effects on the way in which universities teach thereby causing a reappraisal of pedagogic practices.
University Responses

How are universities responding? Competition between universities for students – or at least for the brightest and best students – leads to students seeing themselves increasingly as customers and demanding not only higher quality of teaching but also that the educational programmes provided by universities are adapted to their needs rather than being determined by the wishes and interests of the teachers. In particular students increasingly have an eye on the job market and the skills and competencies which will position them strongly for employment. As universities respond to the growing range of demands and opportunities and to increasing competition, they are becoming more diverse. Individual institutions are seeking to occupy functional niches where there is a good match between their particular strengths and the market opportunities.

The rapid changes happening in universities are causing tensions between conflicting values or aims in a number of areas. These tensions can be summarised as:

- **Innovation versus Standardisation.** Universities must be innovative and experimental. As they respond the external factors, but their teaching and research must satisfy universally recognised standards.

- **Diversity versus Comparability.** Innovation is likely to lead to increased diversity, with a risk that an individual university will become so different that it is effectively 'isolated' from many other institutions.

- **Autonomy versus Accountability.** The university is much valued in order to protect fundamental university values and is an essential requirement for innovation to be possible, the increased public expectations of universities (associated with considerable – if inadequate – public funding) produces massive increases in the demand for public accountability.

- **Public Good versus Private Benefit.** Universities are a public good through the provision of higher education and the creation of knowledge, but they also provide private benefits to their graduates, who have improved employment prospects as a result of their studies at university; the balance between these two elements is now seen to be changing and so raises the question of whether and how the individual beneficiary should make a contribution towards the cost of higher education.

- **Academic Freedom versus Institutional Purposes.** The freedom of individual academics to be innovative and to follow their self-initiated curiosity is essential for the creation of new knowledge, but the institution is responsible for the quality of the activities and is the unit which is publicly accountable - furthermore the success (and perhaps even the survival) of the university depends upon it developing an appropriate institutional strategy in order to occupy a suitable niche.
The resolution of these tensions – which are not new, but have been exacerbated by the current circumstances – requires concerted action by governments, agencies responsible for accountability and quality assurance and the universities themselves. Some of these actions I shall now consider, but before doing so there is one very important principle which cannot be stated too often. This is that in order to fulfil their traditional roles and also to make the maximum contributions to society in all the additional areas where society now has great expectations, universities must be free to be innovative. External regulatory and accountability systems must avoid being so rigid that inventiveness and experimentation are inhibited. There must be a 'light touch'.

Universities as Innovators

Given the wide range of activities which universities are now expected to undertake, no single institution will be able to respond across the entire spectrum. The university system will inevitably become increasingly diverse with individual universities occupying particular niches, some of which will remain broad while others will be quite specific. Each university will have to decide what its fields of concentration will be, and will need institutional autonomy of decision making in order to do this. The alternative is that some national (and presumably governmental) authority will attempt to plan the entire higher educational system for that country! Such a proposal is, in my view, highly undesirable for several reasons. Firstly, it is unlikely to work, in the sense of generating a diverse system which effectively fulfils the expectations of the society; the higher education market is too diverse, too rapidly changing, and in any case operates globally not nationally. Secondly, a national plan is likely to suppress innovation and creativity upon which response to the current challenges will rest. Thirdly, and more profoundly, the heavy involvement of government carries the risk of interference with the fundamental values and rights of universities – which include the right, and indeed the responsibility, to criticise society and governments.

Nevertheless, universities must be accountable to the societies which they serve and which, through public money, support them. And a mechanism for assuring quality of university awards is vital for students and for employers who recruit graduates. To achieve these aims, while allowing universities autonomy, is difficult and requires a delicate balance. National attempts to create schemes of accountability and quality assurance have produced a considerable diversity of mechanisms, but this very diversity makes the objective of producing an internationally accepted quality scheme all the harder. There is an attempt in Europe (the Bologna Process) to create a Europe-wide scheme of mutual recognition of academic qualifications, and I will describe the efforts that are being made towards that objective in a moment. But first it is to identify some general features which must be considered when making any attempt to develop quality assurance systems.

Quality Assurance and Benchmarking

The first point is to reiterate that the individual university is responsible for the quality of the degrees and diplomas it awards to students: any external system of quality evaluation must not subvert that responsibility. Nevertheless students and employer do need to be assured that the university is fulfilling that responsibility. External quality assurance systems (which are
usually national) can however be concerned with two distinct phenomena. On the one hand they can start with acceptance of the universities right to set the standard of its degrees and evaluate the effectiveness with which the teaching and learning achieves these standards that is the evaluation assesses the delivery of education. This is a test of fitness for purpose. Or, alternatively, the exercise can try to judge the standards themselves. This is to test **fitness of purpose**. The latter is much more difficult, but it is ultimately of greater significance to both students and employers and any scheme which provides a really useful comparison across universities must assess standards and create benchmarks.

Any attempt to create benchmarks which facilitate comparability raises considerable problems, even if limited to a national scale. A fundamental issue is to decide whether the comparison is to be restricted to a minimum level of performance – that is the lowest level necessary for the academic award – or should also attempt to identify a range of levels of achievement or grades. This might seem an easy problem to resolve, at any rate in the first instance, by agreeing initially to benchmark the minimum level only. But this is not as easy as it might seem for current practice often recognises a range of levels, while appearing to be diverse in not always equating 'minimum' to 'satisfactory' performance. This view may seem perverse since it is difficult to understand how performance which was regarded as good enough to justify an award (or at least the completion of an essential step towards the award) could be held to be unsatisfactory.

But the underlying perception that there can be such a distinction has come to light in an analysis of some pilot studies in benchmarking in the U.K. This view seems to be related to subject-specific cultures, for in some disciplines (for example chemistry) the assessment of student performance begins with a perception of an 'ideal' performance and marks down to a minimum, with an assumption that anything less than the ideal is in a sense unsatisfactory. In Law on the other hand, the reverse process operates, that is the starting point is to define the minimum. The significance of this finding is that it exposes some deep - and usually unarticulated - assumptions about the purposes of evaluation of student achievement. Such differences in approach between subjects might be manageable if all student programmes were restricted to watertight disciplinary compartments, but increasingly interdisciplinary courses are becoming the norm.

Furthermore the current concern that students should leave university not only with academic knowledge and skills but also with a high level of employment skills, has led to a considerable diversity into both the incorporation of education for the latter but also, and more crucially for benchmarking, into their assessment.

If it is difficult to agree on a common benchmarking at the national level, the problems are multiplied on an international scale, because of differences between countries in the basic structures of educational systems, in particular in the length of initial courses.
The Bologna Process in Europe

In June 1999 The Ministers of Education, or their representatives, from 29 European countries met in the Italian city of Bologna, which is also the home of the oldest European university. There they signed a document which has become known as the Bologna Declaration setting out aims and proposals to create a 'European Space for Higher Education'. The declaration has three complementary themes, which concern:

- Creation of a qualifications framework accepted and recognised across Europe.
- Improvement of the competitiveness of European higher education
- Development of a sense of European citizenship.

Perhaps the most significant issue inhibiting closer harmonisation of European higher education is the heterogeneity between nations in what has become known as the 'architecture' of the framework. In some countries, for example the UK, the first stage of higher education lasts three – or in some cases four – years, leading to the award of a Bachelors degree. For most students this would constitute the whole of their initial experience of higher education and would be followed by entry into the employment market, although a relatively small (but rapidly increasing) number would continue on to courses leading to Masters degrees or Doctorates. On the other hand in many other European countries the initial stage would be of five year duration and include some experience in research activity. This is a fundamental difference and the Bologna Declaration tackled this by recommending that the Bachelor/Master system should be universally adopted, with the first part being of at least three years duration and successful completion of that stage being an essential requirement for entry into the Masters phase which would be expected to last for two years.

This proposal represents a considerable change for some systems and its implementation requires a substantial reassessment by both academics and by employers. The changes are being implemented quickly in some countries, for example the Italian Parliament has changed the law to impose the new model, and governments are often enthusiastic to reduce the length of initial higher education, so reducing costs and moving young people earlier into the employment market. Other countries are moving much more slowly.

But it is clear that effective integration of higher education across Europe will happen only when there is a common architecture and qualifications are awarded at comparable stages in the pathway. However, while such a development is an essential first step, it is not a sufficient requirement. Having a system in which students obtained academic awards at equivalent stages in time would need to be followed by a framework which gave assurance that the knowledge, skills and competencies they had acquired were comparable. This is where benchmarking comes in. In Europe, as part of the process of implementing the Bologna principles, a Diploma Supplement is being developed. This is a common framework for relating transcripts of student achievements so that they can be 'read' in other European countries. Much more work needs to be done to create a comprehensive system of benchmarks and so create a fully operational 'European Space of Higher Education' – but a start is being made.
The Universities of the Future

The European experience demonstrates that there are strong forces pushing higher education towards international convergence, but also powerful forces working in the opposite direction. The pressures towards convergence are the overriding movement to globalisation and the demands from both students and employers for academic qualifications which are internationally recognised. In the opposite direction are the concerns of national governments that 'their' universities should be fully responsive to the national needs of that particular country, while the tendency towards greater diversity between universities exacerbates the difficulties of creating international benchmarks.

Universities must protect their freedom to be innovative and experimental for that is essential if they are to respond to the enormous changes taking place, but they must also be enterprising in attempts to make their qualifications readable and recognisable by other institutions both nationally and internationally. How is this to be achieved?

My view is that reaching this desirable objective will require as a vital initial step the creation of groups of universities operating internationally as strategic networks with clear criteria for recognising each other’s degrees. I believe this will happen because it will be seen to be in the interests of universities to form such alliances in order to be able to compete more effectively in the global market place for higher education. The creation of general systems for international benchmarking and quality assurance should work around such developments. Any attempt to create systems from first principles will be very difficult and slow and, if it ignored what universities actually do, will produce a dinosaur, evolving long after that environment has become quite unfavourable for it!

The fundamental current factors are that the future is essentially unpredictable and overall grand planning is impossible. Networking will be the driving force of common standards, and these will evolve from the experience of universities acting collectively, and interacting with national quality agencies and, most importantly, international associations of such agencies. We are at the moment trying to shoot at a moving target as we move towards what has been described as 'a future as a network of unanticipated consequences'.
Globalisation

Globalisation refers to the increasing flow of technology, finance, trade, knowledge, people, values, and ideas across borders (Knight & de Wit, 1997).

Technology, finance, trade, knowledge, people, values, and ideas have been flowing across borders for millennia. The speed of the transborder flow has constantly increased, with faster methods of transport (of people and equipment) and faster methods of communication (of information and ideas). However, until the last century, we could move information around no faster than we could move people who knew or carried that information. The advent of electronic communication changed that. Messages sent by radio could outstrip the human fugitive - as for example happened with Dr Crippen when the US police arrested him, as his ship docked, for his crime committed in England.

Intriguingly, although the spoken word is more immediate and natural than the written, it was not until computers permitted the rapid transmission and manipulation of the written word that information flow really accelerated. The combination of the affordable personal computer, powerful packages on it, and cheap interconnection via world-wide networks has increased the flow of ideas and data, among individuals, and organisations, by many orders of magnitude. We can now store, retrieve, manipulate and transmit data, representing information, knowledge and ideas. We can do it quickly, conveniently, and in bulk.

Although there are mechanisms for globalisation, mechanisms can remain unused if there are no incentives for their use. However, there are indeed reasons for globalisation? The reasons are inter-related and cumulative, but they include travel, economics & education.

Travel

People have always travelled, to see, enjoy and learn about other places, but in recent years, travel has become more convenient and affordable for more people. In educational institutions, this translates into increased staff and student mobility. This in turn brings with it a desire to have international recognition of credits and qualifications to facilitate travel as a current student or graduate.
Economics

The globalised economy demands standardised products, services (which would include education), technical infrastructure, and sophisticated communication systems.

Many groups of countries are setting up free trade zones, thereby encouraging the flow of trade and finance across the borders within the zone. The trade leads to the movement of people to support it. They take their knowledge, values and ideas. For education, this means the need to educate people who are comfortable with operating in different racial, ethnic and national environments, and whose qualifications to do so are accepted by the recipients of whatever service they are providing.

Multinational companies are not restricted to movement only within free-trade zones. Their effects and needs depend on the nature of the company. For some companies (eg primary producers), the movement of goods between countries is an essential, whereas others (eg consultants) simply carry out the same business in different countries. In either case, however, the companies usually wish to be able to employ staff (professionals and other specialists) in different countries with known qualifications; or to move their staff internationally and have the staff’s qualifications recognised; or to provide staff development activities wherever the staff may be, the results of which must be transferable.

Education

Education has clearly been implicated in the needs arising from travel, and even more from economics. In theory, education can satisfy the needs set out under economics, but not if the nature and quality of the education are known only within one country. Ways are needed to provide, internationally, information about the nature, level, and quality of education.

A second educational reason for globalisation is that people learn about the education on offer elsewhere, and want it. This means that the people travel or the education does. There are many ways to achieve the latter, and each has its own characteristics, benefits and drawbacks.

Thirdly, building on these needs, education itself has become an international business. This is linked to the growing reluctance by governments to fund increasing demand for higher education, plus its increasing costs.

Demands for greater access to tertiary education are fuelled by rapid changes in the economy, resulting in a short shelf-life of diplomas, and the consequent constant need for continuous professional development (CPD) that is internationally recognised. A related factor is the dissatisfaction by industry with the responsiveness of traditional providers.

It is generally agreed that globalisation is a pervasive contemporary phenomenon - for good or ill. This brief introduction indicates the central role played by education in globalisation, and the way in which quality imperatives stand behind education in the global market-place. Thus the growth in globalisation requires explicit attention to international quality assurance (QA) in education.
Education at a Distance

Aspects of global education include: transnational education; on-line education; and collaborative education. These identify distinct emphases, but their actual characteristics intersect, and a single educational activity may take two or more of these forms: on-line education may or may not be transnational; transnational education may or may not be collaborative, etc.

These forms of education all have implications - and challenges - for QA, both the QA mechanisms and activities within an institution, and the activities of external QA agencies. Both internal and external mechanisms have been built in a context of national education, provided through separate, campus-based institutions, and need adapting to international, on-line and networked education.

Transnational Education

Transnational education (TNE) denotes any teaching or learning activity in which the students are in a different country (the 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 (whether the information and the materials travel by mail, computer network, radio or television broadcast or other means).

This form of education clearly responds to several of the economic aspects of globalisation. Mechanisms for TNE include:

**Branch:** These are set up by an institution in a host country to provide its educational programmes to foreign students. Such campuses may be staffed by local people from the host country and/or staff from the home country on short or long-term visits.

**Franchises:** An institution (A) approves an institution (B) in another country to provide one or more of A’s programmes to students in B’s country.

**Articulation:** The systematic recognition by an institution (A) of specified study at an institution (B) in another country as partial credit towards a programme at institution A.

**Distance education:** This is delivered across national boundaries, through satellites, computers, correspondence, or other means.

A recent survey by IDP Education Australia of involvement by Australian universities in TNE found that the typical programme abroad has the following characteristics:

- postgraduate
- business, administration or economics
- Hong Kong, Malaysia or Singapore
- enrolment of 40
- four semesters
- involves a local partner that is an education institution
- face-to-face teaching or supported distance learning
• a curriculum not adapted to local conditions
• an intellectual property owned by home institution
• a responsibility for curriculum, teaching assessment and QA with home institution; for study location, marketing, financial administration with host institution.

**Challenges for QA**

QA in TNE can fall between the cracks of the national QA agencies. To avoid this, either the home QA agency needs to look what its institutions are doing abroad; or the host QA agency needs to look what is being done in its territory by institutions that are based elsewhere; or the home and host QA agencies need to review the activities in their respective territories and then share the information; or there needs to be an international QA agency.

**On-line Education and the ‘Virtual University’**

At present there is no generally accepted meaning of the term ‘virtual university’, or more generally ‘virtual institution’, although at present it is capturing the absence of a campus with a group of academics located together (Butterfield et al., 1999). The concept extends that of traditional distance education, where the students are in distant locations. With the virtual institution, staff are physically spread out as well. Furthermore, the staff who develop programmes may not be those who support them, and those who assess them may be different again.

This is gradually extending to a more general unbundling of activities assumed to be integrally related to each other and to a place (the campus), such as information provision, admission & registration, programme development, study, student support, ‘library’ access, assessment etc. This unbundling depends heavily on programmes being provided and serviced, and students and staff being supported, primarily on-line through some form of computer-mediated communications.

Thus, the virtual institution builds directly on the widely available computer power and computer networks identified as mechanisms for globalisation. The options offered to education via the range of fast and powerful information-provision and information-handling techniques are so great that they are changing the whole character of education - or at least, of some education.

The last phrase is an important qualification. The new modes don’t mean the end of education as we know it. On the contrary, they may be the saviour we need. We’ve been trying to do things like increase enrolments, open access, and provide lifelong learning, while using traditional tools, methods and systems not well-suited to these new tasks. The new modes might enable us to do these things.

We would expect also that they would lead to radically different models for education. In the USA, about 30 courses constitute 80 per cent of undergraduate education, and this may perhaps be met by a small number of large virtual institutions. This could drastically reduce the cost of the education to the individual student and would presumably lead to the closure of some campuses. It might however permit other institutions to specialise in campus-based education, and to be much better resourced than now.
Staff and students would then only attend a particular place (the campus) at particular times for explicit reasons, such as research, advising, social contact and practical work. Attendance may also be related to the nature of the study, being more needed for the a broad ‘liberal education’ (the sort of thing we have traditionally seen as characteristic of a first undergraduate degree) than for subsequent focused vocational or professional study. It is also relevant for doctoral study in disciplines in which research groupings are common, as the research apprenticeship should include experience in working in such groups.

As higher education institutions lose their (near) monopoly of the production, storage and transmission of knowledge and information, their credentialling function will assume even greater importance. As specialist service providers, testing and assessment companies, courseware developers and academic stars become separated, the higher education institution will be the orchestrator of the whole symphony.

Many existing ‘non-virtual’ universities who were not interested in distance education via print or video, are making increasing use of the Internet to develop on-line distance education. Many institutions are taking on on-line education because they envisage economies in staff costs: once a course is created, it can be repeated to indefinite numbers of students without further staff intervention. Increasingly, more careful study is showing this to be a chimera (unless one moves into the mega-university mode as described by John Daniels). Frances et al. (1999) point out issues such as higher initial costs, failure to achieve economies of scale, extra costs to students.

The term ‘flexible learning’ denotes a mixing of modes. As campus-based institutions are introducing distance options via electronic means (possibly for economy or to serve a new clientele) often they find that the major users are their own campus-based students doing some of their courses on-line. Universities that are effectively implementing on-line courses also report students’ appreciation of the high level of interaction with a greater number of other students than usually occurs in face-to-face learning.

Challenges for QA

QA for the virtual institution must address issues such as the lack of a ‘site’ for the external QA team to visit, and, more generally, how to ensure quality of all of the ‘unbundled’ activities. Does the QA agency check each activity? Or does it just confirm that the institution checks them all? Or do we have special-purpose QA agencies (just as we already have professional accreditation agencies in different fields) to check the various activities, with one co-ordinating agency to put all the information together and reach a conclusion? Also, what are the implications for quality control if staff can change the on-line material ‘on the fly’? (ACE, 2000) QA agencies will need to change their procedures.

Collaborative Education

In the UK, this tends to mean franchising, and tends to subsume TNE on the grounds that all off-shore operations involve partners. This, however, is a rather restricted interpretation of the concept.

Two models for collaboration in DE in the USA are Western Governors University (WGU) and the Southern Region Education Board’s Electronic Campus (SREB) (Carnevale, 2000).
WGU is a virtual institution that offers courses created by about 40 colleges and universities. Started in 1998, it offers a competency-based testing system to achieve its degrees, in competition with existing colleges. It has 950 courses, five degrees, and 200 students. It is seeking accreditation, and this is forcing four US regional accreditation commissions to work together.

SREB is a loose collective that started by providing members with little more than a common Internet site on which to advertise their on-line courses. Also started in 1998, it now lists 3,200 courses and 100 degree programmes from 260 institutions. Students earn course credits and degrees from those institutions. SREB has yet to work out an easy credit transfer scheme.

Judging by the numbers, the low-key, decentralised approach seems to have been more successful.

Challenges for QA

QA considerations here are similar to some of those for virtual institutions, specifically the matter of responsibility. Which institution is responsible? How is this responsibly shared? How is the QA agency or agencies involved?

Academia/business collaboration

Other models for collaboration involve commercial partners. Peter Goodhew reports in a recent THES on what he calls ‘Europe’s first totally Internet-based global masters degree in IT’, which was developed by an English University and an Israeli partner, who set up a Dutch company with the help of two American software providers. The government of Egypt has signed an agreement with VirtualAcademics.com for the company’s Barrington University to use satellites to transmit courses in English and computing to Arabic nations.

Universitas 21 is a group of (currently) 18 universities from 10 countries. It was formed in 1996 for a range of academic purposes, including staff and student exchange, learning from each other’s experience, benchmarking, and possibly eventually QA. It is discussing a joint-venture company with News Corp to offer custom-designed academic programmes via the Internet. NewsCorp would provide global distribution platforms and marketing, while the U21 institutions would design the courses. It is intended to design courses specially for this purpose, rather than (like the WGU or SREB) offering members’ existing courses. Degree testamurs will list all the members of U21, which the group obviously hopes will be a big drawcard. It should be a qualification with immediate acceptance in (at least) 10 countries. It is suggested that the venture permits the universities to earn money from the on-line educational world that will enable them to keep loss-making campuses open.

Challenges for QA

Concerned voices ask what happens to copyright, intellectual property, integrity of courses, and academic freedom if NewsCorp decides that profit-making requires particular steps to be taken. Will the AAU allow the University of Auckland to put its name to the testamur unless the course has been through the NZ approval and audit procedures (with similar questions in respect to all the relevant QA agencies)? Who is responsible? Does the QA agency check
everything, or work through one entity?

**Mobility, Recognition and Trade**

One of the flows of globalisation is people. They move to work or study, and this means that they want their study and qualifications accepted in the countries to which they move. In fact, the pressure may be stronger than this. The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) puts a requirement on its signatories that they facilitate the trade in services. This can mean that signatories are required to accept the competence of a consultant educated in another country. Countries within free trade areas (such as the EC, NAFTA, MERCOSUR) have similar requirements stemming from their local agreements (Woodhouse, 2000).

This brings into sharper focus such considerations as consumer protection and cultural impact. Various Codes of Practice have been drawn up to address this. The GATE Principles for TNE (Woodhouse, 1997a) were written with a very strong consumer protection focus. Cultural impact is much more difficult to handle. One way is to require that courses be adapted to match the needs and nature of the society in the host country, but sometimes students do not want such an adaptation, and sometimes the provider uses the adaptation to provide a cut-down course. Other Codes of Practice address the treatment of students who have travelled to study in the institution’s home country.

**Recognition of Qualifications**

Conventions about the recognition of academic degrees have been signed since 1953 when the Council of Europe first proposed general rules of comparative assessment (Barblan, 1999). The last one was proposed by UNESCO and signed in Lisbon in April 1997 by countries from Europe and North America. As a consequence of these treaties, networks of national agencies for academic recognition (the NARIC and ENIC centres) have been created to deal with the external validation of academic learning. The Lisbon Convention has extended their work, and now places the burden of proof on the recognition authority assessing the qualification, rather than its holder. The Convention also seeks information about the methods of assessing the quality of institutions and programmes.

Increasing mobility of students, either mid-course or to a subsequent course, is putting increasing pressure on institutional admissions officers, who find they have to use a great variety of information sources. There is scope here for a ‘database of everything’, that would capture information on all quality agencies and all approved courses at all accredited institutions. We need accurate, up-to-date information on the nature and status of institutions, and the meaning of the qualifications they offer. Such an extensive information bank might be beyond our capabilities, even with the current information handling technology. The main difficulty might prove to be the manual step of keeping the information complete and current.

**Employability**

These recognition systems do not link intellectual power to employability, and European ministers signed the Sorbonne Declaration (May 1998) and the Bologna Declaration (June 1999) to push the development of a European HE Area, and point away from academic
recognition towards competence appraisal. The Bologna Declaration calls for the ‘promotion of European co-operation in QA with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies’. Active discussion throughout Europe is now taking place to set down some basic ideas about the outcomes of HE in European countries.

Multiple employability is also a matter of concern to multi-national companies.

**The Role of Professional Associations**

Attention to the mobility of professionals has given a fillip to professional accrediting associations, whose members have demanded international collaboration between associations in order to achieve international recognition of the professional qualifications. The most cited development in this field is the ‘Washington Accord’ between the Institutions of Professional Engineers in eight countries, agreeing that:

- the criteria, policies and procedures used by the signatories in accrediting engineering academic programmes are comparable; and
- the accreditation decisions rendered by one signatory are acceptable to the other signatories.

Two other countries are on the verge of joining. This gives engineering graduates a high level of mobility.

Despite the wide attention to this Accord, it has not spawned many copies. This may be because the engineering associations are associations that ‘belong to’ their members, and people do not have to belong in order to be allowed legally to call themselves ‘engineer’. Professions more tightly controlled by law or statute are finding the mutual recognition task more difficult.

**Tendencies**

We can note contrary tendencies in this area:

i. increasing rigidity, as countries seek to harmonise structures, eg degree length, learning frameworks, to permit mobility and recognition; and
ii. increasing flexibility, with more emphasis on outcomes, and/or equivalence at a more basic level - ‘substantial equivalence’ in the words of the Washington Accord.

Does it matter if students have multiple credit for the same work? Does it matter that the meaning of ‘degree’ has changed. Does it matter that the meaning of ‘university’ has changed?

**Implications for Quality**

At the 1991 INQAAHE conference, Malcolm Fraser said that the 90s would be the decade of quality. It may be that the coming decade will be the decade of international quality. To support globalisation, educational institutions are paying increasing attention to **internationalisation**, which is the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution (Knight, 1994).
As institutions internationalise their curricula or their research links, or offer courses abroad or enrol foreign students, all these activities should be subject to internal QA processes. By the same token, external QA agencies must be able to assess the nature and effect of these internal processes. This is the process of ‘QA of internationalisation’. Where competence in QA in this area does not exist (whether internally or externally), it must be developed.

A similar phrase with a different meaning is ‘internationalisation of QA’. Most QA agencies started as national agencies, but globalisation and internationalisation of HE mean that increasingly, QA agencies must be able to operate internationally.

Examples of international operation by QA agencies include:

- A QA agency follows its institutions’ courses abroad (eg by sending review panels abroad, or checking at a distance (electronically or otherwise), or contracting another body (eg another QA agency) to carry out the check);
- A QA agency takes responsibility for everything that happens in its region, so it checks educational imports at the border;
- A QA agency recognises the activities carried out and decisions reached by another QA agency abroad;
- There is a global ‘certifying’ agency, which can check and certify the quality of QA agencies themselves;
- There is a global ‘accrediting’ agency, which can check and accredit any institution (perhaps by recognising the results of the check carried out by the relevant national agency).

A Global Accreditor

GATE

In 1995, the Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE) was established to address issues relating to the quality of educational offerings that cross national boundaries (Woodhouse, 1997a). It drafted Principles (a code of practice) to which higher education institutions should adhere in these activities, and set up a process for certifying institutional adherence to the Principles.

Although the Principles are widely used, and there has been a great deal of interest in the certification service, the take-up of the service has been low. This is partly because people have questioned the authority in this field of an organisation with such a commercial basis (a concern exacerbated by recent changes in the governance of GATE).

CRE

For several years, the Association of European Universities (CRE) has been offering an audit service to its members. This has been very popular, as universities choose the scope of the audit to best suit their needs, and the audit becomes a management consultancy carried out by people who have been part of academic management. There has been criticism of a conservative approach - possibly due to having panels comprising former rectors. Like GATE, it operates on a cost-recovery basis.
**IQR**

The Programme for Institutional Management in HE (IMHE) of the OECD developed, and now offers together with CRE and the Academic Co-operation Association, an audit of an institution’s processes and progress in internationalisation (Knight & de Wit, 1999). This process, known as Internationalisation Quality Review (IQR), is at an early stage of its operation, and it remains to be seen how popular and useful it will be. There is a slight tension between whether it is an audit against the institution’s own objectives in internationalisation, or against the definition given above.

**A general purpose accreditor**

Many enquiries to GATE came from institutions wanting, not a review of their TNE, but a broad-scope review of their academic quality and standards. There is room for an agency that will offer such a service. It will be of great value to institutions that want to feature on the international scene, but which are in countries where there is no QA agency, or the QA agency does not have a high international reputation.

**Mutual Recognition of the Activities of QA Agencies**

I have already mentioned the Washington Accord that provides mutual recognition of the actions of eight accrediting agencies. The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education (INQAAHE) is the only vehicle linking national accreditors worldwide. Full Membership is open only to bona fide QA agencies, and applicants’ procedures are checked to ensure they satisfy this criterion before admission. However, the check is only on paper, and no attempt is made to investigate the substance, nor the implementation of the proclaimed procedures. Therefore, membership of INQAAHE is not a sanction of the member’s procedures.

The reason for this approach is that INQAAHE was established for mutual support and information sharing. In this situation, a QA agency that is not operating very well can still benefit from membership, and does not detract from INQAAHE by being a member.

However, the Board is considering the possibility of tightening the membership requirement, in the sense of carrying out a fuller check of the prospective member’s operations. If INQAAHE were to move in this direction, INQAAHE membership would be the organisational equivalent of an engineer or lawyer being a member of his or her professional association, which has checked its members’ credentials before admission. In this situation, INQAAHE could be a vehicle for mutual recognition of qualifications, as INQAAHE membership would provide a guarantee of the performance of the QA that has accredited the institution (using that term loosely) that has granted the qualification (Woodhouse, 1997b).

Even without the INQAAHE Board imposing more restrictive conditions for membership, which could be considered unhelpful, exclusive, or impractical, more formal links can be established between members to facilitate this mutual recognition of qualifications. An Action Group was set up by the Board of the Network at its last meeting in May to take forward the thinking and discussion on Mutual Recognition of QA agencies.
There are a great many thorny questions in this area. For example, can an agency that reviews at programme level and one that reviews at institution level meaningfully recognise each other’s activities? Autonomous institutions are not bound to give credit to a student for work done at another institution that answers to the same accreditor. Therefore, even if two agencies accept the other’s activities as valid and rigorous, will it have any effect on what their respective institutions will accept?

**A Quality Hallmark**

Another Action Group was set up by the Board to work on the concept of a quality hallmark for QA agencies. A ‘quality hallmark’ would need a Code of Good Practice for QA agencies, and possibly then an independent body to certify to this code. Such a process would be analogous to that used in the general QA world, where organisations can be accredited to certify to standards such as ISO 9000.

The proposal under discussion by INQAAHE for an international Hallmark (Vroeijenstijn, 2000) proposes the following criteria:

- The mission and vision of the agency are clearly formulated and made public;
- The agency has competent and qualified staff;
- The agency has a system to assure its own quality, and is itself periodically reviewed;
- The agency’s work draws on the services of competent and qualified people;
- The agency’s protocols for institutional self-assessment and for the agency’s subsequent external assessment are clearly stated and firmly adhered to;
- The methods for setting standards (for processes and outcomes) are open;
- The criteria used for making judgements are clear and public;
- The assessment is a regular and cyclical activity;
- The assessment is carried out by an independent group, panel or committee, and stakeholders have no influence on the judgement;
- The report of the assessment report addresses the most important aspects;
- There is a public report in some form that permits public understanding of the quality and standards assessed.

Clearly there are problems in getting international agreement on such a protocol, from the philosophical (what constitutes independence?) to the practical (can we apply the same process to a programme-review and an institutional-review agency?)

Although I foresee difficulties in getting this concept agreed at international level, the way in may be through national activities. Several countries now have formal processes for recognising QA agencies. These include the USA (the US Education Department and the Council for HE Accreditation), Argentina (CONEAU) and Germany (Akkreditierungsrat). The Netherlands is considering the concept, and the UK has a ‘code of good practice’ in the area promulgated by the Council of Validating Universities.

In 1999, the New Zealand Government proposed a freeing up of the approach to external QA which would have permitted the establishment of more NZ QA agencies and/or the use of agencies from abroad. The proposed ‘quality hallmark’ for a NZ-authorised QA agency is set out in Appendix 1. After this system was designed, the government was voted out, and the new "lefter" government decided (rightly) that the proposed system was too complex for a
small country.

**Priorities**

I have often remarked that, with the possible exception of the US regional accrediting agencies, no external QA agency has been set up by institutions totally voluntarily. Either they are set up by governments, or by the institutions because the latter fear the government is going to set one up.

In a similar vein, I now find my QA agency colleagues rather conservative. They talk about the difficulties of mutual recognition; they baulk at the idea that anyone may judge them for the purposes of giving them a quality stamp and find them wanting. But they may find that the world has flowed on, and marooned them on their island.

As already noted, governments are pushing the issue of mutual recognition; QA agencies are sometimes disparaging of the NARIC-type recognition community, but it is the latter that are at the sharp end of making judgements that can make or break an individual’s profession; professional agencies are moving faster, but again because of the pressure of free trade agreements and the clamour by their members for mechanisms to facilitate their mobility.

Meta-evaluation - ie evaluation of the evaluators - is the next major priority:

- Note the theme of the 1999 INQAAHE conference.
- Note the recent THES headlines about the total explicit and implicit, external and internal cost of the external review processes.

As the new flexibility increases the variety of educational programmes and providers, QA systems aligned to conventional modes may be a force for conservatism. If so, they will be ignored by employers and governments or bypassed by new structures. A more profitable evolution is to develop appropriate guarantees for the new modes.

**The Flexible QA Agency**

One consequence of globalisation is an enormous amount of activity in the QA world, much of it beyond the capacity of individual institutions, and much outside the purview of the QA agency as usually conceived. This suggests that the responsibility for action should be spread more widely. Unfortunately, if something is everyone’s responsibility, it may be no-one’s responsibility, so there may always be need for some ‘agency’ or ‘body’ to check what steps are being taken and how effective they are, but it may not need to look much like an EQA agency as we currently conceive it.

In the commercial world, organisations with strong internal auditing practices are negotiating with their certifying body alternative EQA arrangements to rationalise costs and simplify the process (Kable, 1997). Audit sampling and self-surveillance audits witnessed by the certification body are being implemented by several organisations. Higher education needs to move in the same direction.

The EQM could further customise the procedure by taking account of the academic maturity of an institution in determining the scope, stringency and frequency of audits of the institution and its programme-level activities. Such an EQM could be national or
international.

Our mental image is always of a one-to-one relation between the QA agency and each of its institutions. Perhaps we should move on from this and encourage more interaction between institutions (whether in formal consortia or informal clusters), with the EQM relating to groups of institutions. Taking this further, perhaps the emphasis on the inter-institutional interaction should be on benchmarking, with the detailed management-level parameters being shared between the institutions, but the more global descriptive parameters being revealed to the EQM(s). If the institutional cluster spans various EQM jurisdictions, the agencies should co-operate in their interaction with the group.

Conclusion

Partly as a consequence of globalisation, matters that are now envisaged when the word ‘quality’ is used are very wide-ranging, from academic excellence through national development to international recognition. It is time to take a more flexible approach to our concepts of quality, qualifications, quality assurance, and mutual recognition.

QA agencies or EQMs will become less direct checkers of quality and more orchestrators and gatherers and authenticators of evidence from a wide variety of sources. Their integrity will be essential, but other things (such as ownership or nationality) will be less important. The ability to operate internationally in some way will also be essential, and the marshalling of international evidence will give an international dimension, regardless of whether the EQM is notionally national or international.
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Appendix 1: Design for a New Zealand ‘Quality Hallmark’ for Quality Agencies

QA agencies were to be called ‘Quality Validation Bodies’ (QVBs), and the ‘QA Authority of NZ’ (QAANZ) was the body that would have authorised their operation.

The proposed ‘quality hallmark’ for a NZ-authorised QVB required the QVB to have the expertise, processes, and resources to undertake credible quality assurance consistently and impartially (Woodhouse et al., 1999).

Expertise

- QVBs must understand the characteristics of a quality culture, and act so as to support and enhance it.
- QVBs will be required to make judgements about the quality of courses, qualifications and providers, and must be able to justify these judgements. In order to do this they must draw on sufficient breadth of educational, industrial and quality assurance expertise to make and defend these quality assurance judgements in relation to a wide range of qualifications and stakeholders.
- QVBs must be able to demonstrate that they can monitor and make sound judgements about how providers address responsiveness to Maori issues.

Processes

- QVBs will need to show QAANZ that they have in place robust processes and systems for the quality audit of organisations and for carrying out quality approval.
- The relationship between a QVB and each provider or developer should be set out in an agreed contract that specifies services, requirements, sanctions, etc. This will provide the legal base for QVB decisions. The contracts can vary according to the type of providers or qualifications but will need to reflect sound quality assurance principles.
- QVBs will need to have adequate processes for reviewing providers’ approvals at scheduled intervals to check that quality is being maintained.
- QVBs will need to have, or have access to, a system for hearing complaints.
- QVBs will need to have an appeals mechanism.
- QVBs should not only check on quality but also use all possible opportunities to encourage improvements in quality.

Resourcing

- QVBs will be expected to demonstrate to QAANZ that they are viable organisations – they have a secure funding base, and they have or have access to adequate human resources. Contingency plans would be needed to minimise the risks to the main stakeholders in the sector arising from the potential for failure of a QVB.
Impartiality

- QVBs will need to demonstrate that they are impartial. The likely close relationship between some QVBs and their providers will make the fulfilment of this characteristic especially important. QAANZ will need to ensure the governance arrangements of the QVB reflect adequate independence from those assured. Quality approval judgements need to be made by people from a broad range of backgrounds.

Credibility

- A QVB’s processes should be available for public scrutiny. It must produce public reports of the reviews it carries out.
- A QVB will have adequate protocols for dealing with confidential information.
- A QVB will have a robust process in place for regular self-review.
- A QVB must be prepared to apply sanctions where necessary.
- A QVB will need to have a legal persona which ensures that it can be held accountable in New Zealand.

Consistency

- QVBs will need to ensure that the decisions they make are consistent with their previous decisions.
- Co-operation among QVBs will be needed to achieve consistent decision making between them. QVBs will need to show how they relate to other QVBs and how they intend to foster these relationships. QAANZ will also be responsible for assisting QVBs in the achievement of consistency.

Following these specifications for a QVB, the proposal indicated what a QVB would be expected to consider in its reviews of institutions and programmes. These factors would be analogous to the CVU’s guidelines to its members on what aspects of an institution seeking accreditation they should consider. The QAA’s check of a university’s validation and accreditation processes is then akin to QAANZ’s proposed role in relation to QVBs.
Appendix 2: The External Quality Manager

The ‘external quality manager’ (EQM) could be a body that interacts with institutions and operates by monitoring, reviewing and validating the peer and other activities of institutions and other agencies (Woodhouse, 2000).

Mechanisms it might use at institution level include:

- Audit by the EQM
- Evidence from international benchmarking
- Validation by international consortia
- Accreditation by foreign accreditors
- Accreditation by validating institutions (e.g., the CVU members)
- Accreditation by international accreditors
- Evidence from the achievement of quality awards
- Evidence from ISO 9000 certification

Mechanisms it could use in relation to programmes and qualifications include:

- The EQM’s own programme approval function. This would assist institutions that want a single body to actually carry out all their external quality activities.
- Programme work could be ‘subcontracted’ to other bodies, with the EQM auditing the programme approval operations of its ‘subcontractors’
- The EQM may permit institutions to approve their own programmes (‘self-accreditation’) subject to EQM audits of the procedures. This would assist institutions with well-developed and secure internal processes.
- Evidence from international benchmarking
- Institutions could undertake a system-wide programme-level, discipline-oriented review (cf. The Netherlands)
- Validation by international consortia
- Certification by international accreditors
- Evidence from ISO 9000 certification
- Evidence from professional association accreditation

The EQM could further customise the procedure by taking account of the academic maturity of an institution in determining the scope, stringency and frequency of audits of the institution and its programme-level activities. Such an EQM could be national or international.
It is a pleasure to address you this afternoon. In doing so I wish to record the appreciation of the Council of Australia's University Presidents (the AVCC) to the Ministry of University Affairs of Thailand for giving me the opportunity to be here.

I believe this conference is particularly timely because we are seeing profound changes in higher education throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

Universities are playing an increasingly prominent role in the development of economies in the region, especially by providing many of the work force skills modern industry and business demand. At the same time they are working to internationalise their activities while continuing to place a high priority on their social and community responsibilities. All of this is happening at a time when in many countries, Australia included, universities are being asked to find new and innovative ways to fund their activities.

Although we are nearing the end of the Conference there can be no suggestion that the topics of Credit Transfer and Mutual Recognition are in any sense of lower priority than those discussed at the beginning.

International accreditation of courses and recognition of academic qualifications have been, and remain, substantial challenges to the higher education sector in the Asia-Pacific region. And yet they are matters critical to internationalising higher education and raising academic standards and in strengthening human resource development across the region. They are also fundamental to the free movement of professional and skilled workers internationally – this being critical to, and a concomitant of, the globalisation of the world economy.

While it is true to say that some progress on credit transfer and mutual recognition has been made in recent years, the fact remains that we are a long way short of achieving common accreditation and recognition standards across the Asia-Pacific region.

The diversity of systems and cultures is clearly one of the region’s great strengths. However, it also one of our great challenges, particularly when it comes to setting standards across international boundaries in areas as complex as higher education.

The objectives of my paper today are four-fold:

First, I want to highlight the importance of quality assurance as a necessary pre-condition for credit transfer and qualifications recognition;
Secondly, I want to emphasise the important links between credit transfer and qualifications recognition;

Thirdly, I want to summarise just how far we have come in developing effective credit transfer and mutual recognition arrangements – with a particular focus on the Asia Pacific region;

Finally, I want to turn to the future and put forward some proposals about how we might accelerate credit transfer and qualifications recognition in the Asia Pacific region.

**Quality assurance as a Pre-condition for Credit Transfer and Qualifications Recognition**

I do not need to speak for long on this topic for I believe it is self-evident that unless universities adopt sound quality assurance processes they cannot expect their courses and qualifications to be well regarded either nationally or internationally. This in turn will have serious implications for credit transfer and qualifications recognition.

The key point I would like to make here is that while quality assurance processes are critical, so are perceptions of quality. For credit transfer and qualifications recognition to operate freely and openly, universities must have confidence in the quality and standards of other universities. There needs to be, therefore, a concerted effort not only to foster quality assurance but also to promote its successful outcomes. I want to return to this issue when discussing a possible way forward to accelerate credit transfer and qualifications recognition processes.

**The Links between Credit Transfer and Qualifications Recognition**

Credit transfer and mutual recognition of qualifications are clearly linked. The greater the student mobility and the more that credit is transferred, the greater becomes a university’s understanding of another’s standards. Understanding is, I believe, one of the major barriers to qualifications recognition.

I therefore propose to discuss developments in credit transfer arrangements first since qualifications recognition is in part an outcome of effective credit transfer.

**Credit Transfer Developments**

While many informal university-to-university credit transfer arrangements have been operating for some time, systematic credit transfer processes have been operating for just a few years. The first and most widely known scheme is the European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS) which operates within the European ERASMUS student mobility program.

A trial of the ECTS commenced in the early 1990s and involved a small number of institutions and covered five subject areas: Medicine, Chemistry, History, Business Studies and Mechanical Engineering. The pilot was very successful and has since been extended and built in as an element within the SOCRATES-ERASMUS program. Over 200 universities are now using the ECTS.
The ECTS is a way of organising academic recognition based on transparency of study programmes and students’ achievements. The ECTS does not regulate the content, structure or equivalence of academic programs. These are issues of quality which must be determined by universities themselves when establishing a satisfactory basis for co-operation agreements.

The core principles on which ECTS is based are:

- credit is allocated to course units according to the principle that a normal academic year’s study is equal to 60 credits;
- universities present the full range of courses to which incoming students may have access in an information package in which the credit value of each course is clearly indicated;
- there is a formal ‘learning agreement’ signed prior to departure by the home university, the host university and the student, describing the student’s programme of study abroad, accompanied by a transcript of record listing the student’s past academic achievements;
- for all courses successfully completed abroad, students receive a formal transcript of record from the host institution showing the titles of these courses and the credit which each represents;
- the sending institution recognises the credits received by students from partner institutions in such a way that the credit for the courses passed replaces that which would otherwise have been obtained from the home institution during a comparable period of study.

Reilly (1996) sees the introduction of the ECTS as, for the first time, establishing the basis for a common academic currency throughout the European Union.

Based on the European experience, the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) countries agreed in 1998 to introduce a similar credit transfer scheme – known as the UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme (UCTS). The development of the UCTS was funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

This was a very important initiative for it provided universities in Asia and the Pacific with a mechanism by which they could translate the value and grades of courses which their students had undertaken when studying on exchange at foreign universities into those which would eventually be awarded by their home university. University participation in the scheme is of course based on more than some mathematical evaluation of the content of the course studied by the student. It is also based on a great deal of confidence and trust between the partners. That trust is built out of understandings about quality assurance.

The beauty of the UCTS procedure is that it is a win-win situation for both the universities involved in each negotiation, and the student. It requires a negotiated procedure between all parties. It protects the integrity of both universities. Above all it protects and rewards the academic achievement of the student. Operating at the academic coalface it is a practical outcome of quality assurance measures.

I know Professor Mizuoka will be speaking to the conference a little later on UMAP developments and I expect he will also touch on the UCTS. I will therefore say nothing more about it except to suggest that if anyone would like more information on the scheme this can be found on the UMAP web site – [www.umap.org](http://www.umap.org) and the AVCC web site – [www.avcc.edu.au](http://www.avcc.edu.au)
Mutual Recognition of Qualifications

Qualifications recognition is difficult and complex. Governments, higher education institutions and international organisations in Asia and the Pacific region have cooperated over the last 20 years to bring about mutual recognition of higher education qualifications but much remains to be done. The cooperative approach was exemplified in the negotiation and eventual agreement on the UNESCO Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific. Soon after its adoption as a UNESCO Convention in 1983 it was ratified by sufficient countries to enable the formation of the Regional Committee. The Convention came into effect in 1985. This was a defining moment in regional cooperation in education in Asia and the Pacific.

I am proud to say that Australia, and Australian universities, have taken a prominent role in working towards mutual recognition of higher education qualifications in the Asia Pacific region and continue to do so. We actively participated in all stages of the drafting of the UNESCO Convention, its adoption and signing and later in lobbying governments to ratify it. That commitment was led as many of you will recall by a former Australian Prime Minister, Mr Gough Whitlam, and I would like to pay tribute to him for the vision and enthusiasm that he brought to this important work.

Because of our realisation that mutual recognition of qualifications in higher education embraces not just our immediate geographical environment (Asia and the Pacific) we also sought admission to the other UNESCO Regional Conventions, principally the Europe Regional Convention.

We did this because 20 years ago our commitment to mutual recognition of qualifications in higher education was mainly driven by our desire to assist regional cooperation, to be a good corporate member of the international community, and to assist Australians, particularly those with family connections in other countries, to get recognition of their Australian university qualifications. In all honesty I have to say that there was little consideration at that time of today's quality assurance issues and the importance of qualifications recognition in a globalised world economy.

While regional conventions are important, it must be recognised that on their own they cannot achieve mutual recognition of qualifications. They are the result of multilateral negotiations with the inevitable, and necessary, political and practical compromises. They cannot bind individual universities to accept any other universities' qualifications. That task must be done on a bilateral basis by individual universities or national organisations of universities.

I am aware of a number of initiatives at the bilateral level which are seriously tackling the qualifications recognition challenge. By way of example, I would now like to share with you the recent experience of the Council of Australia's University Presidents in establishing agreements on mutual recognition of higher education qualifications with our counterpart organisations.

In recent years we have undertaken a programme of establishing agreements on cooperation in higher education with our counterparts, mainly in Asia and Europe. To date 15 such agreements have been signed, each including mutual recognition of qualifications as an area of cooperation. We understand that recognition of qualifications is a sensitive area. However, we also recognise that in many countries universities are either at present self-accrediting institutions or will become self-accrediting in the near future. This freedom gives
universities, and their group organisations, a very valuable opportunity to approach the question of recognition of qualifications.

In order to take advantage of this opportunity we are at present concluding bilateral agreements with our counterparts which build on the basic cooperative agreement by adding an appendix which provides guidance to universities in both countries to admit students to studies in higher education. In doing this we define the award from one country and then state how that award should be regarded in the other. For example in a recently concluded agreement between Australian and German universities the following provisions are found:

- The German *Vordiplom/Zwischenprüfung* should be regarded as comparable to two years of study towards a Bachelors degree in Australia;

- Holders of a *Diplom [FH]* from a *Fachhochschule* [University of Applied Science] should be eligible for admission to Australian graduate programmes which have as a prerequisite an undergraduate degree or equivalent [Copies of the full text are attached to this paper].

We believe that proceeding this way, and with this level of detail, worthwhile and practical agreements can be made. Progress will not be quick. However, it is a pathway which we recommend for your consideration.

While these and many other initiatives at the bilateral level together with those at the multilateral level have been wide-ranging and substantial, in all honesty we have a long way to go before we can say we are close to developing a common academic currency, either regionally or globally. With this in mind, I would like to put forward a suggestion as to how we might accelerate processes.

**A Way Forward**

International mobility in higher education and credit transfer and qualifications recognition are inextricably linked. Each promotes the others. Conversely, the lack of each can seriously inhibit the others.

I have already put this point to you in terms of the importance of mobility in promoting credit transfer and qualifications recognition. But of course, credit transfer and qualifications recognition are important factors underpinning student mobility, an important goal in its own right.

Smith (1996) reporting on a 1993 meeting of experts sponsored by the OECD and the Laurasian Institution, noted that transferability, comparability and convertibility provide a framework for a competitive, open, dynamic, yet rational international exchange. He states that:

Implementation of these principles is designed primarily as a trust-building process. The more unfamiliar the higher education system or institution, the greater disinclination to trust the educational value of coursework or credentials, and the less encouragement to international educational mobility.
To meet the principle of transparency, Smith argues that systems of higher education must be open to external examination and explanation. The information provided must enable those considering a particular institution or system to evaluate the differences and similarities as compared to an institution or system with which they are most familiar. On convertibility, Smith notes that in facilitating mobility in international education it is important to nurture diversity. As a result it is not appropriate to impose commonality. However, there must be a reasonable means of converting educational value generated in one system into another.

How might we promote student mobility in the Asia-Pacific region?

The University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific programme has been operating successfully for several years. However, only recently has it moved from an embryonic stage, with the establishment of a Secretariat in Tokyo and the adoption of a Constitution to formalise governance and administrative arrangements. I will say no more on these developments since Professor Mizuoka, I am sure, will cover them in detail. I would however like to make the point that under UMAP the number of exchanges is small compared to levels in other regions. Even in Australia, which is one of the more active members of UMAP due not only to the commitment of Australian universities to the programme but also to the funding support from the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, numbers remain small (Figure 1). Numbers sent in 1999 represent about 0.3 per cent of all university students in Australia. About 5 per cent of students in Europe participate in ERASMUS. The target is 10 per cent.
The primary reason for the low numbers regionally is the limited funding available. A survey undertaken in Australia in 1996 showed that limited funding was the most significant barrier to mobility. Interestingly, lack of credit transfer was also identified as a major barrier (Figure 2).
If governments in the region seriously want to promote credit transfer and qualifications recognition, I would like to suggest that a stronger commitment be given to UMAP. Perhaps governments in the region might want to follow the fine example recently set by Japan with its very substantial funding commitment.

Funding support for UMAP could also be tackled multilaterally. In particular, I would like to suggest that the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum look more seriously at UMAP than perhaps it has done to the present. While APEC has formally endorsed UMAP it provides no funding to it despite the fact that education interaction and qualifications recognition matters are priorities for the APEC Human Resource Development Working Group. Substantially increased regional mobility in higher education and the establishment of common accreditation standards across the region would be major achievements and contributions by the Group to both aspects of APEC’s agenda - trade and investment liberalisation and facilitation and economic and technical cooperation. UMAP provides a way of working towards these ambitious objectives. Furthermore, like SOCRATES-ERASMUS in Europe, UMAP can play a major role in building an Asia-Pacific perspective in the minds of the region’s future politicians, diplomats and business leaders. This perhaps needs to be brought to the attention of APEC leaders.

**Summary and Conclusions**

I now summarise the key points I have made today. First, and returning to the overall theme of this conference, quality assurance is a necessary pre-condition for effective credit transfer and qualifications recognition advancement. Universities must have effective quality assurance processes in place. They must also promote these processes and their outcomes since perceptions are also critical to recognition processes;

Second, there is a critical link between credit transfer and qualifications recognition. The first can help to build understanding and trust between universities, which in turn can foster qualifications recognition;

Third, there has been some progress in developing effective qualifications recognition and credit transfer frameworks, both at the multilateral level, particularly through the efforts of UNESCO, and also bilaterally. However, this progress has been constrained, in part because emphasis on quality assurance is a relatively recent phenomenon; and

Finally, one way to accelerate credit transfer and qualifications recognition processes is by significantly increasing the university mobility programs, for both staff and students. The Asia-Pacific region is fortunate to have a well structured and increasingly active mobility programme in UMAP. Leaving aside the critical importance of mobility in its own right, why not use UMAP strategically to tackle the significant credit transfer and qualifications recognition challenges confronting the region? Why not follow Europe’s lead and use student mobility and formal credit transfer processes associated with it to work towards a common academic currency? While the challenges in the Asia-Pacific region are different to those in Europe, we do have an excellent starting point with UMAP and the UCTS already in operation.
Let us encourage a strengthened commitment from governments in the region to UMAP and the UCTS. This can be done on a unilateral basis but also on a multilateral basis through APEC.

I would like to conclude today by emphasising that quality assurance, student mobility, credit transfer and qualifications recognition are inextricably linked. Enhancements to one will impact positively on the others. Let us therefore continue to encourage collaboration between governments, regional bodies and university organisations and universities themselves in all of these fundamentally important areas. The Thai Ministry of University Affairs is to be congratulated for hosting this conference which is an important step in the collaborative process.

References


III. COUNTRY AND INSTITUTIONAL EXPERIENCES
Measuring Outcomes in Australia’s Higher Education Sector

by

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Introduction

The growing emphasis on quality assurance has brought with it a sharper focus on outcomes from higher education. This trend is evident both in Australia and overseas. The main purpose of this paper is to describe the work done, chiefly over the last decade, measuring outcomes from the Australian higher education system. The first section provides the context for the discussion that follows by examining pressures for greater quality assurance and other factors underlying the increasing focus on outcomes. The second section describes the development and measurement of a range of graduate outcomes including employment, satisfaction, attrition and skills. In particular, emphasis is placed on the contribution of national surveys of graduates to this process. In the third section we show how measures of outcomes are used in highlighting standards in the higher education sector through performance indicators. The paper highlights some important conceptual and methodological issues surrounding the development of performance indicators. The conclusions are presented in the fourth section.

Context

In discussing graduate outcomes, a key consideration is the transition to a mass higher education system evident in many countries. In Australia, during the 1970s the number of higher education students doubled in size and has done so again since the 1980s. Concurrent with this growth there has been a growing diversity of institutions and programmes. In addition, alternative forms of delivery arrangements have flourished, in part driven by changes in technology. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that in this environment there have been increasing calls for assurance about standards and quality in higher education. Changes in graduate outcomes represent an important dimension of quality and are therefore one means of judging whether standards are changing in response to these pressures.

Another significant driver has been the increasing pressure on public finances since the 1970s. With seemingly ever increasing calls on public funds from health, welfare and education expenditures, governments and the community have, over time, demanded greater accountability for public expenditures. Over the last 10-15 years, the pressures on public finances combined with growth in student numbers have created an environment where private contributions to higher education have been increasing to more fully reflect the benefits derived by individuals from acquiring a higher education qualification. Inevitably as the level of private funding increases, there will be greater pressure to ensure institutions are meeting students’ needs. This explains, in part, the increasing focus of institutions and students on vocational outcomes.
It is also worth noting that the demands for quality assurance exist at both a sectoral and institutional level. Take the case of the growth of international students both in Australia and overseas. This is an example where there is a demand for reassurance about high standards and outcomes at both a sector wide and institution level. Overseas students, for example, face choices about which country to study in and also in which institution they will choose to enrol.

There have been a substantial range of initiatives directed at demonstrating the quality of the Australian higher education system over the last ten years. The development of the Australian Quality Assurance Framework is given a more comprehensive treatment in Jones, Pearce and Karmel (2000). It is sufficient for the purposes of this paper to highlight some of the more important developments to demonstrate the scale of activities and increasing focus on quality assurance in recent years. Starting in 1992, the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education was established to advise the government on quality assurance issues and from 1994 to make recommendations to the government on the allocation of annual quality-related funds. Between 1993 and 1995 the Quality Assurance Programme led to the independent audit of institutions’ quality assurance processes. From 1998 onwards, institutions have been required to submit Quality Assurance and Improvement Plans as part of the annual Profiles discussions between government and institutions concerning performance and resource needs. The plans are expected to discuss goals, strategies and outcomes in the key areas of teaching and learning, research, community service and management. The plans provide information on graduate outcomes such as employment and perceptions of teaching. More recent quality assurance initiatives include the development of National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes and the establishment of the Australian Universities Quality Agency. In the following section, we describe how the measurement of graduate outcomes has contributed to the quality assurance processes outlined above.

**Measuring Outcomes**

There are a range of indicators of outcomes from higher education including graduate destinations, student perceptions of course quality, student perceptions of the research training environment, completions, attrition rates and graduates’ generic skills. In this section, we focus on data that is collected nationwide that can be used to describe both sector wide outcomes and also outcomes at a lower level of disaggregation, for example, by institution or field of study.

**Graduate Destinations**

Perhaps reflecting the strong vocational orientation of the Australian higher education sector, the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) represents the longest standing of the national surveys of graduate outcomes currently available. The GDS has been conducted on an annual basis since the mid 1970s by the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (GCCA). The Commonwealth Government provides funding for the suite of graduate surveys and institutions providing in-kind support in the form of survey administration. The GDS represents a complete enumeration of graduates finishing their courses each year. Approximately 90,000 graduates respond to the survey producing a response rate of over 60 per cent.
The GDS measures graduates’ destinations four months after completing their courses. The survey provides information on the type of employment including industry, occupation and salary level. In addition, the survey provides information on other destinations of graduates, including details on further study arrangements such as the level and field of further study. The survey also provides contextual data including basic demographic details and information on prior study.

**Figure 1**

Bachelor degree graduates in full-time employment as a percentage of those available for full-time employment, 1982-1999

![Chart showing percentage of bachelor degree graduates in full-time employment from 1982 to 1999.]

Source: Graduate Careers Council of Australia, *Graduate Destination Survey*, various editions.

(a) Note, there is a break in the series. Up to 1991 data refers to all graduates, permanent residents plus overseas citizens, and thereafter only permanent residents.

The GDS represents a potentially rich and, to date, relatively underutilised source of information with which to gauge the relationship between developments in the higher education sector and changing labour market outcomes. The Department is in the process of commissioning further work to ensure that data from the survey are presented showing destinations by various classifications, some going back as far as the mid-1970s.

**Satisfaction among Coursework Graduates**

The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) measures graduates’ satisfaction with various aspects of their courses. It has been conducted on a nationwide basis for the past seven years. The CEQ has its origins in the work of Paul Ramsden and others, commencing in the UK in the early 1980s, it examines student evaluations of the quality of teaching and learning. The results of a trial version of the CEQ were reported by the Performance Indicators Research Group in 1991 (Linke, 1991).

Since 1993 the CEQ has formed a one page adjunct to the GDS. The CEQ consists of a series of 25 questions seeking graduates’ satisfaction with various aspects of their course including teaching, goals and standards, workload, assessment, generic skills and a single question referring to overall satisfaction. National level CEQ results for various classifications such as field of study, level of study, gender, age and equity groups are presented in the annual CEQ report. The CEQ data are used extensively within institutions to manage institutional performance. They form an integral part of benchmarking data both across and within institutions. In addition, CEQ data are used to inform student choice and are now routinely...
included in student guides. Institutions are increasingly using CEQ results for marketing purposes.

Figure 2
Overall satisfaction*, 1993 –1999

Source: Graduate Careers Council of Australia, Course Experience Questionnaire, various editions.
(a) Overall satisfaction refers to the percentage of graduates responding 3, 4, 5 on a 5 point scale to the question, ‘Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of this course.’
(b) Note, there is a break in the series. Data refer to all graduates in 1993 and 1994 and thereafter only to Bachelor level graduates.

More recently there has been some commentary that the CEQ is too narrow in focus and might alternatively measure broader aspects of the student experience. In response, the Department commissioned a pilot study in 1999 which found that factors such as student support, learning resources, learning community, graduate qualities and intellectual motivation might be included within the scope of a broader CEQ. The precise form of an extended student satisfaction instrument is currently being negotiated by stakeholders within the higher education sector.

Satisfaction with Research Training

While the CEQ is directed towards assessing the experiences of coursework students, it is less appropriate for research students. To this end, in 1997 the Department commissioned the development of an instrument capable of measuring various aspects of postgraduate research experience. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in conjunction with GCCA has developed a 28 item instrument, the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ), which measures research graduates’ satisfaction with supervision, skills development, intellectual climate, infrastructure, thesis examination and goals. The PREQ was administered on a nationwide basis for the first time in 1999 and the broad level results are shown in Figure 3.

A major consideration in the interpretation of data from the PREQ, in comparison with the GDS and CEQ, is the much smaller population for the survey. There are around 5,000 postgraduate research completions nationwide each year. The response rate to the 1999 PREQ was a little under 50 per cent yielding 2,200 usable responses. One of the problems this creates is that if the PREQ is to be used for benchmarking purposes, that is to make institutional comparisons or comparisons within a field of study across institutions, then it is
likely that in some instances cell sizes will be quite small and the reliability of data is then called into question. One proposed solution to overcome the variability of data inherent in small populations is to aggregate data over several PREQ surveys. Thus a PREQ score averaged over, for example, three years, may be considered more reliable than a corresponding estimate drawn from a single PREQ survey.

**Figure 3**

Graduates’ satisfaction with various aspects of their research training, 1999

![Bar chart](image)

Source: Graduate Careers Council of Australia (2000).

**Generic Skills**

The tendency for graduates to move into an ever broader range of occupations suggests that over time employers are likely to place an even higher premium on generic rather than discipline specific or technical skills. The Department has recently commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to develop a test of generic skills for application to entry level and exiting students. At entry level, test results might be used by institutions to assist poorly performing students. At exit level, test results might be used as additional criteria for entry into post-graduate courses, to indicate the attainment of generic skills to employers or to measure value added by institutions or for comparing differences in student profiles between fields of study.

The ACER conducted a trial test, the Graduate Skills Assessment (GSA), in April 2000 measuring skills of exiting students in the four areas of critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal understandings and written communication. A more extensive test is presently being conducted in October/November 2000 with around 20 institutions and up to 4,700 exiting students expected to participate. Initial results are expected to become available in February 2001. It is anticipated entry level students will commence taking the test in March/April 2001. It is likely that the test will gradually develop over time to measure a broader range of generic skills. It is anticipated that participation in the tests will increase over time once the utility of the tests becomes established.
Attrition

The capacity of institutions to retain their students is a further measure of the quality of teaching and learning within institutions. Other things being equal, a higher attrition rate across the system or among certain groups of students might represent evidence of wastage and therefore be cause for concern. However, whether attrition truly represents wastage depends to some extent on the causes of attrition. For example, if students are making poor choices as a result of insufficient information then remedial action is probably warranted. In reality, there are a number of considerations that will influence students’ decisions to continue with their studies. Students’ expectations, course content, course circumstances are among many factors that are likely to impact on retention/attrition.

At the undergraduate level, the national attrition rate suggests around one in every five students leaves their institution each year. This figure does not include students completing their courses. Also, students moving between courses within institutions are assumed to be retained by the institution. This acknowledges that some students may not make ideal choices in their initial course selection and that there exists some mobility between courses. Groups of students that appear to have higher rates of attrition than others include part-time and external, rural and isolated, male, indigenous, English speakers, agriculture and arts and those with lower academic achievement. Students’ main reason for dropping out appears to be that the course did not meet their expectations.

It must be acknowledged that some level of attrition is inherent in all education and training systems. Individuals circumstances may change and it may be impossible or inefficient to eradicate all deficiencies in information, selection, resourcing and the like. In addition, attrition is not a ‘one way street’. In some cases, uncompleted courses may yield benefits to both individuals and government.

Completions

An analysis of completion rates tells a broadly similar story to that for attrition (Urban et al., 1999). The completion rate refers to the proportion of students commencing study at a particular point who eventually complete an award. A cohort analysis of 1992 students found that 60 per cent of students enrolling in 1992 had completed an award at the same institution by 1997. Around 34 per cent had not completed an award and were not studying at the same institution in 1997. A further 6 per cent were still studying. However, once allowance is made for students returning to study or moving to a different institution, it is estimated that around four in every five students will eventually complete their courses. Students less likely to complete an award included, on average, males, external, lower academic achievers, indigenous, English speakers, some fields of study and those from an isolated background. Perhaps not surprisingly, the characteristics associated with attrition and completion are broadly similar.

This section has described some of the key measures of outcomes in the higher education sector. In the following section, we show how these measures of outcomes have been used in developing performance indicators for higher education.
Performance Indicators

Performance indicators in the higher education sector have a number of purposes. First, sector wide and institutional indicators serve public accountability purposes. They can also assist in shaping the development of policies. The second major function of performance indicators is to assist institutions in managing performance. They can be used for benchmarking purposes across institutions and to assist the management and delivery of education services within institutions. Third, they can be used to better inform student choice. Performance, as measured, by indicators, may be one among a number of other elements, for example the students’ own interests and peer views, that influence students in guiding their choice of institution and course.

At the outset it is worth emphasising the limitations of performance indicators. It is tempting to place undue emphasis on a set of performance measures simply because they are usually readily grasped and interpretable. Performance indicators will be one amongst a variety of measures used to manage resources and develop policy in the higher education sector. For example, institutions will use quality plans, peer reviews and many other mechanisms to review performance, say, within faculties. Governments will use performance indicators but will also be influenced by many other factors including the views of stakeholders, budget constraints and technological developments in developing policies for the sector. Another major drawback of performance indicators is that, unless there are a sufficiently broad range of indicators capturing the breadth and diversity of activity within the sector, then they have the potential to distort behaviour in adverse ways. This is often an argument against linking funding to performance measures. That is, institutions will change their behaviour in ways to maximise performance against some indicator to increase funding, but this may be at the expense of activity elsewhere. While on occasions this may be desirable, the potential for adverse side effects must be recognised. Other concerns with performance indicators relate to considerations like relevance, reliability, auditability, transparency and timeliness (DETYA, 1998). Therefore, it is advisable at the outset to be aware of the many pitfalls and limitations of performance indicators.

The development of performance indicators has been the subject of continuing, and at times intense, debate within Australia. Reviewing developments over the last decade, the Performance Indicators Research Group (1991) commenced the trialling of a broad range of indicators suitable for assessing the performance of higher education. As noted earlier, this group was largely responsible for the trialling of a version of the CEQ, and on the recommendation of this group, the present CEQ commenced shortly afterwards. This group also recommended the inclusion of graduate destinations as a measure of institutional performance. This exercise was followed in 1994 and 1996 by the release of various indicators for higher education institutions by the Department. Diversity and Performance of Australian Universities (DEET, 1994), contained 28 indicators of diversity and performance including indicators of student pass rates, drop out rates and completion rates and graduate destinations. This was followed in 1996 by the publication, Diversity in Australian Higher Education Institutions, 1994 (DEET, 1996) presenting 68 indicators across the areas of students, staff, resources and research. Indicators of graduate outcomes included in this publication referred only to graduate destinations.

In 1998, the Department published The Characteristics and Performance of Higher Education Institutions (DETYA, 1998) comprising 360 indicators covering students, staff, finances and
outcomes. Graduate outcomes data in this publication includes retention rates, student progress rates, graduate destinations and, for the first time, graduate satisfaction (CEQ). The publication used a combination of clustering and factoring techniques to summarise this mass of data (though not all indicators were included in this particular exercise) and to empirically derive the key characteristics of institutions within the higher education sector. This demonstrated at the one time the similarity and diversity of institutions.

One of the major issues addressed in this latest edition of performance indicators was the frequently stated criticism that the actual values recorded for institutional indicators reflected the characteristics of the student population and as such did not represent a true or fair measure of institutional performance per se. For example, arts graduates rate their courses more highly so that institutions with higher concentrations of arts students would be expected to achieve higher CEQ scores all other things being equal. Thus the problem with presenting crude CEQ scores is that they might conflate the impact of the composition of the student population and graduate satisfaction with the quality of courses.

The 1998 edition of performance indicators published by the Department attempted to overcome this problem by calculating an expected value of the indicator for each institution based on a set of national benchmarks. These national benchmarks were calculated for each cross-classification of gender, age, language background, indigenous status, socio-economic status, geographical status, broad field of study, level of course, basis of admission and type of enrolment. That is, we calculate national averages at a very fine level of disaggregation. Figure 4 shows the expected value of the retention rate indicator for each institution by way of example. In most cases, the expected value of the indicator differs by only one or two percentage points from the national average of 78 per cent (not shown in the graph). This implies that adjusting for student characteristics makes very little difference to the value of the performance indicator for most institutions, though there are some notable exceptions among smaller institutions which tend to have atypical student populations.

By comparing the actual value of the indicator with the expected value, and these are shown for each institution in Figure 4, it was possible to derive a measure of institutional performance for each of the outcomes indicators. The calculation of the expected value of the indicator was computationally difficult, especially where the matching of student enrolment data and graduate destinations data was required. This particular version of performance indicators, therefore, did not rate as highly on the criteria of transparency and auditability discussed earlier.
A further issue addressed in the development of performance indicators is the inherent variability among the student population. The idea here being that the value of the performance indicator for a particular institution may vary from year to year, simply because the quality of students varies from year to year in ways which cannot be readily captured by measurable variables. For example, a factor such as the motivation of students impacts on performance but this is not easily measured.

We demonstrate the variability associated with institutional performance indicators by calculating a confidence interval for our estimated performance scores. For example, Figure 5 shows the performance score for each institution and an associated confidence interval for supervision from the 1999 PREQ survey. However, the confidence intervals are calculated in a slightly different manner from the standard confidence intervals around a point estimate. The confidence intervals presented in Figure 5 demonstrate whether there are significant differences in institutional performance, say between institution A and institution B. If the lower end of the confidence interval for one institution is above the upper end of the confidence interval for another institution, then we interpret this to mean that institutional performance is significantly better at the former institution.

In addition, Figure 5 uses a high performing institution, the fourth highest in this case, as a benchmark with which to judge the performance of other institutions. We observe that the lower end of the confidence interval for the benchmark institution is above the upper end of the confidence interval for several more poorly performing institutions. The conclusion we draw from Figure 5 is that most institutions’ supervisory practices are of broadly similar quality. However, there are a few institutions where closer scrutiny of supervisory practices appears warranted and that these institutions might benefit from examination of the experiences of better performing institutions.
Figure 5
1999 PREQ, supervision performance scores and confidence intervals by institution

Supervision:
Institution Means and Standard Errors *1.39

Source: Graduate Careers Council of Australia (2000).

A new edition of performance indicators is anticipated to be published by the Department by the end of this year. The methodology for adjusting outcomes indicators to remove potential distorting effects due to the influence of student characteristics is to be reviewed. A more conventional regression approach is to be adopted. This approach calculates the impact of student characteristics on outcomes indicators and corrects for this. The residual value of the indicator, that is the value of the indicator that cannot be explained by student characteristics, will be presented as the performance indicator.

Conclusions

The measurement of outcomes from the Australian higher education system appears to be subject of ever increasing scrutiny. The particular outcomes to be focused on and their measurement is not without controversy. Australia is in the fortunate position of having relatively rich sources of data to measure graduate outcomes which are collected on a consistent basis across the Australian higher education system. However, it must be acknowledged that these measures have their limitations. Without appropriate recognition of these limitations there is the potential for misuse of data. At the same time it needs to be recognised that these national level data will need to be complemented by institution specific measures suited to managing the diverse needs and backgrounds of institutions.
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Credit Transfer and Institutional Recognition
Lessons Learned: Indonesian Case

By

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Background

Indonesia is currently facing a critical transition toward a more democratic civil society. After experiencing the worst crisis ever, the nation is in its reconstruction period healing its wound. A new democratic civilian government is in place and community participation is encouraged. The entire nation is in its transition period toward building a new democratic civil society based on people participation. After more than three decades under an authoritarian government, however, credibility of the government and other formal institutions is very thin. People then turn to the higher education institutions hoping that such institutions can play as credible moral force. Such role will of course only be the case if the institution itself maintains its integrity and quality.

During the last decade, the Government has been striving very hard to develop its higher education in a number of aspects. Equity issue is addressed by expanding the existing system to allow more access to higher education, and expansion of the geographical distribution of the system in order to respond to the local and regional needs. Although the term of expansion is usually more in the quantity aspect, qualitative aspect should also be taken into account for instance to match the segmentation of the job market. Thus science and engineering fields for example, which up till now are still outnumbered by humanities, shall be considered as one of the issues to be addressed.

Table-1: Projection of student enrolment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1995</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population in million</td>
<td>194.8</td>
<td>209.5</td>
<td>222.8</td>
<td>254.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population in 19-24 age bracket</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation rate in HE (%)</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student enrolment (million)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table clearly indicates that higher education institutions in Indonesia shall undergo major expansion during the next decade and beyond. At the same time the urge for more quality graduates from the job market has become more and more apparent and thus requires serious attention from the higher education institutions.

Indonesia recognizes two main categories of higher education institutions, they are public or state owned and private institutions. To date, there are only around 70 public higher education
institutions (including Polytechnics) throughout the country and around 1200 private higher education institutions. In terms of number, more than 70 per cent of the student enrolment belongs to the private institutions. Every year, around 0.5 million of high school graduates are competing for around 60,000 seats available at the public higher education institutions. The so-called National Entrance Examination has been used by the public universities/institutes to select their new students. Such examination is carried out nationwide and coordinated as well as processed centrally.

**Quality and Structural Issues**

The basic measure in every organization is quality, reflecting outputs and outcomes that meet particular standard set by its users or customers. A higher education institution is a professional organization that provides an environment where creativity, ingenuity, and productivity will be higher when flexible and independent working patterns are used instead of structural and rigid ones. Thus implementing autonomy in the university management becomes imperative. A university, however, has always been linked to and dependent upon its environment, that value system, norms, and regulations that prevail and its surrounding community should always be taken into account and referred to in the university management. The concept of autonomy implemented therefore should be bundled with external or public accountability.

In order to provide an objective information to the society with regard to the quality of a higher education institution, some measures of accreditation should be developed. Ideally such accreditation shall be undertaken by an independent body which is directly responsible to the public. In 1996, the government i.e. the minister of education established the National Accreditation Board (NAB). The board has a dual responsibility, i.e. quality assurance through peer review and public accountability through a relationship with the government. Since its establishment, the board has managed to accredit quite a few programmes in public as well as in private institutions, and publicly announced the accreditation status of the evaluated programs. Unfortunately, however, the board has not been functioning effectively as expected, thus the results have not been highly regarded by the society.

In addition to the National Accreditation Board, the government established also the Board of Higher Education (BHE) in 1996. This board is expected to function more as a buffer mediating between the Directorate General for Higher Education (DGHE) as the funding agency and universities as the beneficiaries. The BHE, as characterized by its membership, is acting more as a peer organization protecting the universities from possible bias in government policies.

As far as the curriculum is concerned, the national curriculum for each discipline has been formulated and its development has been the responsibility of the ad-hoc committee established by the BHE. The national curriculum generally constitutes around 60 per cent of the total credits. The other 40 per cent will be local content developed by the respective department. Nationwide, the higher education system adopted the so-called credit system, although in some fields such as Medical Education such system is not fully implemented.
Mobility of Students

As has been described earlier, the competition to enter a public university is generally very tough, especially those considered as favorite ones. Only around 16 per cent of applicants are enrolled at the public universities annually. The rest will go to private institutions or postpone their plan to study for the next year. Among the public universities themselves, the level of competitiveness varies from the very competitive ones admitting only less than 3 per cent of applicants to the rather moderate level of competitiveness. For this reason, students are not in the position to move around from one university to another, not even from one department to another within one university.

In the case of private universities, the competition levels are more varied. In some favorite private universities the competition is almost as tough as in the public ones. By the same token, students’ transfer between private institutions is also rare.

Having said that however, there are cases where credit transfer does actually take place. The following are common examples of such cases:

- It is quite common to observe students entering a programme after taking the entrance exams for the second attempt. In this case the student had already enrolled in another program, which is usually taken at another university, and hence it is likely to happen that some courses have already been taken. Therefore, the student wishes to transfer the credit earned from his/her former institution. Normally, general education courses will be easily accepted, whilst other courses will require some further evaluation.
- A student who is quitting a public university for some reason, will be easily accepted at some private university. In private universities student entrance does not necessarily have to be at the beginning (first semester) of the program. In this case, a credit transfer can significantly lessen the student course load at the new programme.
- Students undertaking exchange programmes in an overseas institution are quite often involved in some credit earning activities. Usually such courses are categorized as the general subjects and hence, as described before, the credit earned can easily be transferred.

In any case the compatibility of syllabi as well as its weight shall be taken as the first requirement for the transfer to be processed.

The above two examples have triggered quite substantial issues to be addressed in conjunction with credit transfer. Firstly, there is a need to formally define mechanisms for credit transfer. Along with it, measures to attest the quality of a unit undertaking in a higher education programme should be in place. The National Accreditation Board can play a quite important role in this matter.

Secondly, an especially interesting case is the credit transfer resulting from the student exchange program. It is very well known that an international experience will contribute significant added value for university graduates in entering the global market. It is therefore very important to facilitate such activity by providing an integrated scheme including possibility for credit transfer.
Thirdly, there is an increasing trend of distance education where credit earning activities can easily take place. In this regard, the issue of credit transfer can be very subtle and complex to deal with.

**Concluding Remarks**

We have discussed the current problems as well as future challenges within the context of credit transfer and institutional recognition in Indonesia. Simply put, the central issue around it is directly related to the issue of quality. The quality assurance system at the macro as well as micro level is one of the urgent problems to be dealt with. In addition to it, there are also factors external to the higher education system, such as the globalization, national economic development, social and cultural as well as political issues.
From Internal Evaluation to Quality Assurance in Higher Education: The Case of Medical Education in Iran

By Abbas Bazargan
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Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEI) are expected to be responsive to the needs of their environments. The HEI through application of management functions would achieve their objectives with efficiency and effectiveness. Functions of the HEI management are as follows: a) planning; b) organizing; c) directing; d) monitoring and evaluation (Bazargan, 1999). Among these, monitoring and evaluation have a crucial role to play. On one hand, to facilitate planning, organizing and directing activities of the HEI; and on the other hand, act as a subsystem for quality improvement and quality assurance in higher education. Based on the above, evaluation helps quality improvement in higher education and, makes higher education accountable. Maintenance and improvement of higher education quality are considered as shared responsibility of every person in an academic institution (Barnett, 1995). In this respect, the process of quality improvement (QI) requires faculty members to play a major part. This could be achieved through internal evaluation (Bazargan, 1995). However, accountability of higher education systems (ACHES) requires the practice of rendering an account of resources spent and the objectives achieved. In order to make the HES accountable, in addition to internal evaluation, there is need for external evaluation and accreditation. This can be achieved through quality assurance (QA). The QA is considered as a systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and quality improvement (Vroejenstijn, 1992). The purposes of the QI and the ACHES are two extremes at the same time. Therefore, a question is raised ‘how to manage the two extremes at the same time?’ Toward answering this question, the paper in the first part, reviews objectives of internal evaluation (self-study) and in the second part, examines the extent to which external quality assessment (EQA) helps achieving the QI and ACHES. In doing so, requirements and the process of each are analyzed. The analysis is based on the experiences gained in an Iranian pilot evaluation project in medical education.

Institutional Evaluation in Higher Education in Iran

Higher education system in Iran has been expanding very rapidly during the past two decades. The average annual growth rate of student population during this period was 9.7 (Tavakol, 1999). The total enrolment in higher education institutions is about 1,400,000 in 2000-2001 academic year. More than 52 per cent of the student population is enrolled in a non-governmental system called Islamic Azad University (IAU). The IAU is considered the private sector of higher education in Iran. The private and the public sectors of higher education in Iran have been under tight state control (Bazargan, 1999). There are two parallel systems of
university administration: i) medical university system (MUS); and ii) non-medical university system (NMUS).

Planning of the two sub-systems of higher education has been a part of the national development planning process. The national higher education plan has been dealing with the control of inputs (number of students, staff, financial resources, etc.). During the past two decades, in the process of higher education planning, attention has been focused on the 'means' rather than the 'ends'. In other words, the planning documents have strong emphasis on input objectives of the national system of higher education, rather than identifying the results such as outputs (graduates, etc.) and outcomes (employment, etc.).

In recent years, there has been a movement to give more autonomy to universities. This movement is advocating less state control over curriculum development, student intake, etc. As part of this movement, there has been an interest in institutional evaluation. Based on the above, a pilot self-evaluation project was initiated in the medical university system in 1996.

**Departmental Self-Evaluation in Medical University System**

In recent years, several attempts have been made to measure and enhance the quality of higher education in Iran. In 1990 a proposal was prepared to assess academic activities of universities and rank them according to certain national criteria. However, due to resistance from the rectors, the proposal was not put into practice (Bazargan, 1999). A major reason for such resistance was that many institutions of higher education are newly established. The rectors of the new institutions feel that if a national set of criteria is being applied to assess the HEI, it might be judged as 'not strong enough' academically. The rectors had the feeling that such a judgement would give negative feedback to faculty members as well students. Hence, it would not help improve the academic quality.

In 1996, the Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education, which is responsible for medical sciences universities, initiated a project on internal evaluation (self-study) One of the purposes of the project was to motivate faculty members to participate in the process of quality improvement of their departments. The pilot project was carried out in six departments. In each of these departments 36 indicators were applied to assess the quality of inputs, process, output and outcomes (Bazargan, 2000). In summary, results of pilot internal evaluation (IE) are as follows: a) the IE helped faculty members to get motivated toward an active participation in quality improvement process; b) departmental goals were redefined and its objectives were clarified; c) existing resources of the department were reviewed and a strategic plan was drawn to maintain and enhance the quality.

The impact of the pilot internal evaluation project was so impressive that the Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education decided to request all the departments of internal medicine, at the medical science universities, to carry out an internal evaluation project. Consequently, more than 30 departments of internal medicine started to conduct self-evaluation in 1998. The majority of these departments carried out internal evaluation and prepared a final report.

In conducting internal evaluation, each department, through participation of faculty members, has taken the following steps:
• Conducting a workshop for the faculty members to familiarize them with the aim of internal evaluation;
• Forming a task force committee to prepare a time table for carrying out the steps and shoulder the responsibility of monitoring the process of internal evaluation;
• Clarifying departmental mission objectives in teaching, research and professional services;
• Identifying factors (input, process product, output, outcome) that displayed departmental quality;
• Identifying criteria for assessing the factors under evaluation (36 criteria are proposed for conducting internal evaluation (Bazargan,2000) );
• Identifying conditions under which departmental results could be observed and indicators that can lead to judgement of performance;
• Selecting or developing data collection instruments;
• Defining the population under study (students, graduates, employers, etc.) for collecting data on each indicator;
• Collecting data on the variables under assessment and tabulating according to evaluation questions;
• Making judgements about the quality of the factors under evaluation, by comparing the present situation with departmental objectives.

Based on the above, each department prepared a draft evaluation report. It was circulated among faculty members for comment. Then the results were discussed in a general departmental meeting. Faculty members were requested to consider the results of the evaluation and make suggestions for improving the present status of the department. Based on this, policy proposals were formulated for improving departmental quality. These policies covered four levels: a) department, b) faculty/school, c) university, d) medical university system.

The impact of carrying internal evaluation on departmental quality has been so remarkable that the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology which is responsible for comprehensive universities (in the fields of engineering, basic science, agriculture, humanities, etc.) has decided to request the departments to conduct self-evaluation.

Need for External Quality Assessment and Quality Assurance

As mentioned previously, internal evaluation serves the purpose of quality improvement. However, to make higher education accountable, there is need for external quality assessment. Internal evaluation is considered the first step toward quality assurance. It should be followed by external quality assessment (EQA). Quality assurance refers to ‘those mechanisms and processes used to lead to maintenance and improvement of quality outcomes and so to enable key stakeholders to have confidence about quality control procedures in place and the standards achieved in terms of outputs’ (Harman, 1996).

In the external quality assessment, the review committee is expected to check the content of the internal evaluation report, review the proposed recommendations, contact students and faculty members and finally certify that certain requirements are being met. The internal medicine community in Iran does not yet determine these requirements. But a group of professionals argue that the requirements should be determined internationally. There is
another group, who advocates the process of identifying national requirements for EQA at the universities of medical sciences in Iran.

In this respect, steps are taken to follow-up the internal evaluation in the internal medicine departments by external evaluation. To review the readiness of faculty members at the internal medicine departments for the EQA process, an interview was conducted on a number of departmental chairpersons and faculty members who have carried out internal evaluation at the medical science universities. The results of this interview indicate that, although faculty members have been motivated to participate in the process of internal evaluation for quality improvement, they feel uneasy about the EQA at this stage. They argue that the medical university system includes more than 30 universities and higher medical education institutions (MEI). The majority of these institutions were established in the past two decades. These MEI are not at the same developmental stage. Therefore, it is argued that the EQA, which is based on international requirements for a department of internal medicine, frustrates the process of quality care resulting from carrying out the internal evaluation project. Furthermore, it would hinder any further action in quality improvement.

To overcome the disagreement between the two groups, it has been proposed that a set of requirements be identified for the departments of internal medicine at the national level. Then, each of the departments, which has carried out internal evaluation, forms a review committee from the members outside of the department. The members of the review committee (RC) would be composed of the same university, but not from the same department. The internal evaluation report would be sent to the RC for review. If the results were acceptable by the RC, then the university would request a national review committee to visit the department for a national EQA process.

Conclusions

Student population in higher education in Iran has increased very rapidly in the past two decades. This has drawn the attention of authorities to improve the quality of higher education more than the past. Furthermore, a subsystem of higher medical education was set up during this period (Bazargan, 1999). In doing so, schools of medicine and medical science related programmes were detached from comprehensive universities to form universities of medical sciences. As such, a university of medical sciences (UMS) was established in every province. More than 30 universities of medical sciences have been established around the country. The aims of this subsystem is to: a) train health and other related professionals, b) conduct research on the problems of health and medical services, and c) provide health and treatment services at the regional level in the geographical region under the university. Each of the UMS, in addition to the above-mentioned objectives, is responsible for administering the regional department of health in the geographical region under the university.

Based on the above, higher medical education systems realized the need for institutional evaluation. Although there was a kind of inspection of higher education, which was called evaluation in Iran, it was a sporadic activity. Therefore, quality care became a necessity in higher education system in general, and in the medical education system in particular. Consequently, the medical sciences university systems initiated an internal evaluation (IE) mechanism for quality care. The IE process provided a ‘mirror’ for each department to reflect the realities of teaching, research, and medical and health services provided by the department. Then, based on the specific objectives, which are being delineated, at the start of
the IE process, judgements are being made about the quality of the department. This process is being considered as the first step in the process of quality assurance.

To make higher education institutions accountable, there is need for an EQA system. However, in order to conduct EQA there should be a strong commitment to transparency and accountability. These two concepts may be considered the pillars of evaluation culture. Internal evaluation process promotes this culture and prepares the ground for quality assurance. Through the internal evaluation mechanism, faculty members are empowered to care for the quality. Faculty members are considered the crucial power toward attaining 'quality higher education.'

Each country, through the IE and EQA based on the national requirements, could provide the grounds for establishing a regional set of requirements and criteria. Then, countries of the region in Asia could set up a regional mechanism to make it possible to have joint peer group services to assess each other’s higher education systems. The UNESCO-PROAP is expected to assist activities towards setting up such mechanisms.

References


Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Standards and Mechanisms in Korea

By

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Introduction

Korea has made efforts to ensure quality in higher education. Especially, in order to strengthen the competitive position in the world and meet a minimum criteria in the quality of university, a new type of University Accreditation has been started since 1994 with a seven-year term on a nationwide scale after trialling accreditations during 1982 to 1992. The University Accreditation is executed by the Korean Council for University Education (KCUE), and the Committee for University Accreditation in the KCUE is run for its fairness, objectiveness, and a final decision regarding accreditation. Once a university is accredited, its accreditation lasts seven years. The first round of the University Evaluation will run out by the end of this year and the second term of university evaluation will begin from the year 2001 with a new and revised plan.

Goals

The main goals of the University Evaluation in Korea are as follows: 1) to consider the excellence of university education; 2) to consider the efficiency and effectiveness of university education; 3) to increase the responsibilities of universities; 4) to give more freedom to universities in their authority; 4) to encourage cooperative relationships among universities; and 5) to support universities financially.

Organizations

The system of university accreditation is run mainly by KCUE, the committee for university accreditation, and other supplementary committees, which keeps fairness and expertise from governmental interference in the evaluation process. The operation framework is as follows:

KCUE

- Carries out overall work and processes of university accreditation;
- Manages and supports the committee for university accreditation and the planning committee through the division of evaluation which is under control of the KCUE;
- Executes research related to the university evaluation;
- Trains crews for university accreditation.
The Committee for University Accreditation (CUA)

- Keeps independence in its management and actions on the results of university evaluation, even though it belongs to the KCUE and works together with it;
- Is composed of 15 members who are appointed by the chairperson of the KCUE (five or less from representatives of industries and social organizations; 5 or less from of presidents or professors of universities; two or less from experts on university evaluation, Vice-minister of Education, Chair of the Steering Committee for University Accreditation; and the Secretary General of the KCUE). All of the members are appointed for two years, except the last three who remain on the committee indefinitely;
- Makes decisions for basic directions and categories of work for university accreditation.

The Steering Committee for University Accreditation (SCUA)

- Is in charge of making strategies for university accreditation, the preliminary decision making of results of university evaluation, and supports the whole process of university accreditation;
- Is composed of 10 or less professors, appointed by the chairmen of the KCUE who are mostly experts in university evaluation. The Chair of the committee is selected from presidents of universities.

Evaluation Team

- Operates temporarily during a period of university evaluation;
- Does on-site visits, evaluation and self-study reports of an institution;
- Members of the evaluation team are selected from the university professors, and the numbers of the team vary each year depending on the numbers of the universities to be evaluated.

The Appeal Committee

- Is composed temporarily in case an institution requests reconsideration of the result of accreditation;
- The members of the committee consist of five or less professors who are experts in university evaluation. Professors who are members of the evaluation team cannot be members of the appeal committee;
- Reconsiders the result of the evaluation, makes final decisions on the evaluation, informs the institution of decisions.
Procedures

First Step: Application and selection of universities for accreditation.

- Institutions are requested to apply for accreditation, and this is voluntary. After deciding when institutions wish to have accreditation, the institutions notify the division of evaluation in KCUE of the time chosen for accreditation;
- The expected year and period for the accreditation of an institution are set up by the CUA and the university is informed by the division of evaluation in KCUE.

Second Step: Self-study of an institution

- Based on the guidebook for university accreditation, an institution selected for accreditation composes a research committee for self-study and a steering committee for self-study;
- The research committee for self-study prepares the report after self-evaluation of its own institution according to the criteria provided by the KCUE;
- The steering committee for self-study makes the final decision about which is to be excluded from the self-study report;
- After the president’s approval of the self-study, it is sent to the division of evaluation in KCUE.

Third Step: Initial evaluation of self-study report and on-site visit by an evaluation team

- The division of evaluation in KCUE decides when to make a visit to the institution and organizes an evaluation team according to the advice of the Steering Committee for University Accreditation (SCUA).
- The evaluation team evaluates the self-study report first, and does on-site visit for two or three days.
- After the on-site visit evaluation, the evaluation team prepares a report for the result of evaluation and sends it to the division of evaluation in KCUE.

Fourth Step: Accreditation action and public release of accreditation information:

- The division of evaluation collects and summarizes the report of the evaluation team and sends it to the CUA after the approval of the SCUA;
- The CUA reviews the report and makes a final decision as to whether an institution is accredited or not;
- The division of evaluation in KCUE notifies the institution of the final decision of the CUA re accreditation;
- An institution can apply for reconsideration of the decision by submitting appropriate materials to prove its worth if it is not satisfied with the final action.
Table 1
Standards of the University Accreditation (Undergraduate Level)

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<td>-Class</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Research</td>
<td>-Amount of research achievement</td>
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<td>-Conditions of research</td>
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<td>-Research supporting systems</td>
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<td>3. Social Service</td>
<td>-Quality of social service</td>
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<td>-Cooperation of university out of campus</td>
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<td>4. Faculty &amp; Instruction</td>
<td>-Distribution of faculties</td>
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<td>-Workloads of faculties</td>
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<td>-Management of personnel (faculties)</td>
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<td>-Self-development of faculties</td>
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<td>5. Facilities &amp; Equipment</td>
<td>-Physical facilities such as classrooms or labs</td>
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<td>-Instructional supporting systems</td>
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<td>-Tools and materials for research &amp; experiments</td>
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<td>-Health care resources, dormitories, &amp; cafeterias</td>
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<td>6. Finance &amp; Management</td>
<td>-Soundness of finance</td>
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<td>-Budget planning &amp; management</td>
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<td>-Strategic planning &amp; evaluation</td>
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<td>-Administration &amp; management of personnel</td>
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<td>-Fairness of decision making</td>
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Uses of the Results of the Accreditation

The results of accreditation are used as follows:

1. The Government (Ministry of Education) uses the results for supporting universities financially such as providing subsidies, scholarships, or research funds.

2. The Government (Ministry of Education) uses the results for providing universities with more autonomy in areas such as numbers of students, opening a new academic department, or budget.

3. The results will be a useful data for development and growth of universities.
Quality Assurance for Higher Education in Vietnam in 21st Century

By

Dr. Tran Khanh Duc
NIED-MOET Vietnam

Introduction

At present, higher education in Vietnam is facing several critical challenges. Some of them are to do with increasing quantity and quality in training. These are to accompany changes in higher education administration in general and quality assurance in particular. This report is to introduce the first research findings on quality assurance for higher education in Vietnam towards the 21st century.

1. Higher Education System in Vietnam

In Vietnam, besides other ministries, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) plays the main role responsible for the higher education system. MOET's responsibility includes policy making, guidance, supervision, and coordination of all other educational programmes and bodies, such as other ministries, provincial authorities, and/or administration of the higher education institutions.

The higher education system has been institutionalised by Decree 90/CP dated 24 November 1993 on 'Structure of National Education System and Qualifications'. The higher education system consists of three levels of study: college undergraduate and postgraduate level. The postgraduate is divided into two levels: master and doctoral level. Study time required to obtain higher education qualifications can vary from three years (associate bachelor certificate) to eight year (doctorate) in total. According to the Education Law, which was on 2nd December 1998, said 'The Minister for Education and Training approves a decision to set up junior colleges and preparatory universities. The Prime Minister approves the establishment of universities' (Article 47).

In the academic year 1999-2000, the higher education system of Vietnam has 153 universities and colleges, including five multi-disciplinary universities and 148 higher education institutions and colleges. The 148 universities and colleges consist of 47 public higher education institutions, 16 people-established institutions, 79 public junior colleges, four semi-public junior colleges and one people-established college. The total enrolment has increased from 671,120 in 1997-1998 academic year to 893,754 in 1999-2000.

The Vietnamese Government has always paid special attention to the training and upgrading of teaching staff in higher education. In the academic year 1999-2000, the teaching staff comprised 30,309 teachers, among whom, about 30 per cent are female; about 15 per cent are doctoral degree holders while associate professors and professors accounted for approximately six per cent.
2. Higher Education Development Strategies in Vietnam up to 2020

The development of higher education is considered one of priority. Education and training development strategies in Vietnam up to 2020 are aimed at building up a system of modern higher education with the ability of satisfying the knowledge-based needs of manpower. Tertiary education makes a contribution to the development of science-technology, culture-art, production, business and service, simultaneously helping improve knowledge which promotes a healthy lifestyle among people.

In parallel to the consolidation of a university network, a number of universities with quality higher training are being built and facilities, training conditions and scales are being developed and intensified. It is intended that the ratio of students per 10,000 should be about 300 in 2020. To implement development goals, the higher education system in Vietnam needs to be continuously innovated and perfected. The following are the main solutions being considered:

- To intensify effective management of agencies responsible for higher education from central to universities, to build perfect legal system of higher education to control training quality at universities by agreed criteria;

- To innovate curricula, instructional methods at universities, to modernise training content by providing more scientific and applied technological knowledge and overcoming one-way instructional methods so that students' creativeness and self-study will be promoted.

- To develop a contingent of administrators and academics with a view to standardising academic titles at university level, the objective being to increase by 20-30 per cent the numbers of teachers with masters degrees. Attention should be paid to the development of the best qualified experts involved in instructional, scientific research activities, technology transfer and other production-services.

- To diversify and intensify financial resources for higher education from government budget, tuition fees, scientific research contracts, production services, support from socio-economic organisations, individuals, aid and loans from foreign countries and international organisations.

- To expand and intensify international co-operation in higher education, to make full use of funding and technical support from other nations and international organisations thereby serving high quality training programs. Foreign cultural and training institutions are encouraged to open in Vietnam. Universities will be encouraged to actively participate in organisations like the ASEAN Association of Universities, UNESCO and UNDP. Excellent undergraduate and post-graduate students are to be sent to study priority subjects in countries which have advanced science and technology. By gradually preparing higher education integration, recognition of equivalent qualifications with ASEAN nations and the world will be developed.
3. Higher Education - A Model of the Total Training Process

This is a general model. It shows components of the training process and factors for quality training and quality assurance for higher education. The model includes inputs (students and learners, teaching staff and instructors, equipment and materials, physical facilities). Training process involves training, research, and servicing activities. Training outcomes consists of graduates' knowledge, skills, attitudes and capacities. Ultimate outcomes (labour market) refer to employment status, productivity, earnings, career development and adaptation to help young people to live harmoniously in society.

4. Standards and Mechanisms for Accreditation Decisions in Universities

Standards: At present in Vietnam, there are some research projects re standards for accreditation and evaluating training quality in universities. In general, the system of standards consists of some important indicators. These are:

- Standards about teaching staff: The percentage of professors, doctoral degree holders in teaching staff at universities.
- Standards about equipment and material: quantity and quality of equipment and materials for training and researching.
- Standards about financial resources for training and research.
- Standards about management and evaluation.
- Standards about curriculum development and research programmes.
- Standards about knowledge, skills and attitudes in the target of training programmes for graduates.
- Standards about the percentage of graduates and employment after graduation.
Mechanism for Accreditation Decision (There are four steps - see table below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application for Accreditation</th>
<th>Institution self-study</th>
<th>External Assessment</th>
<th>Accreditation Decision</th>
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At national level: The Ministry of Education and Training has responsibility to make policies, regulations, and standards in accreditation quality assurance for universities, and colleges. A special organisation for accreditation under MOET is established. This organisation is responsible for external assessments. The results of the external assessments are based on the accreditation for decision of MOET.

At education institution level: Universities have responsibility for internal self-study and to send reports to MOET.

The cycle of the accreditation at universities is about five years. Accreditation results are divided into three levels: excellent, good and fair. Universities who are classed as 'excellent' will get State priority.

Conclusion

This is a draft research in Vietnam about quality assurance in higher education and will be implemented in the near future. I do hope through this International Conference, we can learn more from regions and other countries.

References


New Degree Programs: Trying to Respond to Public Need

During my four months as a Fulbright Scholar here in Thailand, I have offered workshops for professors on seven different university campuses. Almost inevitably, at every campus I have at some point been asked by senior faculty members or administrators to join ‘informal discussions.’ The topic is always the same: the local campus is planning a new degree program, often at the graduate level; some or all of the work will be done in the English language; the faculty and potential students all want ‘international recognition’ of the new degree. The program is carefully described to me. I am then asked: Do you think your university would recognize this program?

In all instances, I am sympathetic with the local administration’s aims. In fact, in very real ways I share the pain they feel at the current state of higher education. What is that state? We all know it. One component is language. Without any government plan or United Nations policy, English almost accidentally has come to be the language of international communication---first, perhaps, in aviation and in business; then in entertainment; more recently, in computerization; and now, in education. Some of the statistics are startling. In 1999, for example, 84% of the research reports and articles published by faculty members in France were in the English language. Efforts to resist the dominance of English lack popular support. It is reported that in Cambodia, college students are rewarded with $25 if they take a course in French. But there are few takers, even though $25 represents an average monthly wage. Why? Almost all of the students want instead to learn English. (See Burton Bollag, ‘The New Latin: English Dominates in Academe,’ in The Chronicle of Higher Education, September 8, 2000. Internet access:

To meet this demand, universities are creating English-based programmes in record numbers.

The second component that pushes educators toward revolution is economics. The economies of many countries have in recent years fallen. For the moment, at least, parents in many countries are demanding quality in higher-education opportunities for their daughters and sons at home, because they can no longer afford the long-range investment of sending children abroad.

Professors in the affected countries also know the pain related to these two components. Their own incomes are often depressed and not rising. And, while they understand student demand for English, they are also very reluctant to stop providing higher education in their own language, a step that would lead to linguistic stagnation.
Let me return to my story. Sitting around a table with two professors and one vice president, I listen to a summary of their proposed new doctoral program. All instruction will be in English, I am told. Each student will produce a dissertation in English. The emphasis will be on high-quality research.

'Who will be accepted into the program?' I ask.

'Only students with high TESOL scores,' one of the professors tells me.

After reviewing additional requirements, one of the professors continues, 'We plan on teaching them to do research. Do you have any advice on how we can do that?'

'Well, of course you and your faculty colleagues will be the primary trainers. Will all of your faculty be involved in this program?'

The local professors exchange glances. 'We hope so,' one finally tells me. 'There’s a little problem, though. For most of us, writing in English is very difficult. So some of us don’t do much research. Can you help us?'

'Will your students have done research as part of their master’s program—any kind of research? Will your students be comfortable with English through prior experience?'

More exchanged glances. 'Well, we hope so,' the vice president tells me. 'We are hoping to get only the best students. Some of them might come directly from bachelor’s programs. We will train them to do high-quality research so that they will be prepared to teach others. And they will write a dissertation in English.'

I look down at the table, pausing while I try to figure out how to respond. 'In most Universities, students who are accepted into a doctoral programme already have done quite a bit of research, even if it isn’t original. For the doctorate, they have to do original research. If you accept students who have to learn to do research from the beginning, and if you accept students who haven’t done much writing in English, they are going to have to work very hard and, most probably, very long. How will the students feel if they have to spend six or eight years in the program?'

'Oh, that long is not possible.' All three of my hosts shake their heads.

Again I pause. 'Have you thought about starting with one or two of your bachelor’s programs? It might be best to train some students in English as undergraduates, so that when they begin graduate study they can focus on doing research from the beginning, without having to worry about language.'

'Oh,' the vice president tells me. 'That would take too long. We need new PhDs now. What can we do to get our doctoral programme recognized?'

'First work to build up a very strong foundation,' I said. 'That may take some time.'

Unfortunately, you can’t achieve recognition just by demonstrating a social need, or just by announcing a new program.
Credit Transfer: Concerns of Different Stakeholders

We are here to talk about mutual recognition of our academic programs, and about transfer of credits.

I want to focus on the issues behind this topic, particularly from the perspective of an American professor. As my story shows, professors in different countries view the issues differently. So do others who are affected by transfer practices. After reviewing the issues, I will then go on to ask if current practices serve our various needs.

Who is affected by credit-transfer practices? Let me first describe what I’ll call the 'politician’s interest.' It is by no means limited to professional politicians, or to any area of the globe. But it does seem rooted in the polis, the external forum in which impressions are shaped. This concern involves prestige and status; it involves being recognized as an equal partner.

There’s nothing wrong with wanting to be recognized as equal. It is eminently human, a concern we have all experienced, wherever we are from, whatever we do. Some social biologists say that the concern with recognition is rooted in our genes, in our in-born drive to attract partners through whom we will improve our gene pools.

No one wants to be overlooked. At a personal level, we resort to cosmetics and fancy dress to increase our chances of being noticed. In the political arena, every candidate seeks to win by claiming to have the best plan to achieve excellence, even when he or she knows that a district’s finances will not support broad-based excellence. At an academic level, students, in order to have achieve high grade averages, sometimes register for ‘easy’ courses. Professors sometimes inflate their biobibliographies with long lists of ‘papers’ that were presented at meetings among friends. Administrators may give every programme a lofty title. All of these actions are in the hope of attaining recognition.

The desire to 'look good' can be a great motivator, and it can sometimes propel a group to unexpected levels of achievement. It becomes a problem only when appearances become a replacement for reality, for universities as well as for politicians.

The next group that is concerned with credit transfer is the staff professionals who work under a registrar or an institutional dean. Their concerns are many, and are quite varied. In my experience, they work very hard to carry out institutional policies correctly. They also work hard to be fair. Registrars and their staffs often strike me as idealists, no matter how often they are caught in competing demands from students, their parents, professors, administrators, and politicians.

The next group—the group most affected by the decisions of registrars—is students, along with students’ personal bankers, their parents. While students and their parents may claim that they are in a particular university because of a desire for ‘a good education,’ most have a more basic goal. Most seek economic advantage: ‘I’m here to get a good job. I’m here to get a good degree. I’m here because of this school’s reputation. And I’m here to get out as quickly as I can. If for some reason I transfer to another school, I don’t want to be punished by having to spend extra semesters earning my degree.’
Again, there is nothing wrong with these goals. They represent the practical side of human affairs. If we didn’t attend to the practical, we would very seldom move forward as a society.

The last group of concerned professionals is professors—we professors, I should say. What do we stand for? Most of us entered our profession because we like to ask questions and like to find answers; we probably also like to help others find similar kinds of pleasure. We tend to be a bit fussy about the conditions under which we do research. We tend also to be fussy about students. We want to be confident that when a group of students from our school graduates, they are truly educated. We also want to be confident that when we accept new or transfer students, they are ready to be educated.

**Credit Transfer in the US Today: Triple Evaluation Plus**

No matter how varied the concerns of its stakeholders, a university’s recognition is rooted in acceptance of its academic programs, and that means in the transferability of credits. Credits are, after all, the ‘currency’ of educational institutions: students ‘earn’ credits; universities ‘accept’ credits ‘toward’ degrees; unacceptable credits are ‘deducted’ from transcripts—all of this in ways very similar to the ways of banks that deal with transactions involving paper money. The bottom-line importance of ‘credits’ has been underlined in recent years by politicians’ meddling in their transfer: Some politicians have tried to mandate mutual recognition by ‘legislating’ transfer of credits among ‘district’ or ‘system’ schools, no matter what professors or outsiders may think about the shortcomings of some of the schools.

Legislated acceptance of credits, however, does not extend beyond the range of the politicians’ constituencies. Legislated recognition has no impact on transfers between unrelated schools, and does nothing in the international arena, which is what we are talking about today. To promote transfer across districts and across borders, we have up to now looked to accrediting agencies. These agencies, such as the Western Association of Schools and Colleges in the US and the International Baccalaureate Programme for secondary schools, use faculty-determined standards and faculty-run assessments to promote mutual recognition and transfer of credits.

However, accreditation is far from a failsafe mechanism today, if ever it was. More and more schools have their own credit-transfer standards and most US institutions make their own determinations about credit transfers, even when petitions for transfer involve schools accredited by the same agency.

Let me sum this up. To earn credit toward a degree, a student first must earn passing grades on a course instructor’s evaluations. If the student wants to transfer that credit, the school that granted the credit has to have earned passing scores from an accreditation agency. Finally, the newly involved school, the credit-accepting institution, will review the content and level of the course-credits proposed for transfer to see if they ‘fit’ with its own curriculum. This triple evaluation is now standard among US universities. It represents a minimum. In many cases, a student also has to have earned a particular standardized test score before a transfer of credits is even considered. For international students, the number of evaluations may be even higher, since many schools also require a test involving English-language proficiency.
Why? Why do students who want to transfer beyond political districts face three, four, or five ‘checks’? This approach is certainly not in response to demands from US students, who don’t want to be penalized for mobility, or from parents, who don’t want to have to pay for extra semesters of study.

Who, then, is responsible for difficulties with credit transfer? Who makes mutual recognition difficult? It is primarily I and my colleagues—the university faculty.

**Credit Transfer and US Professors**

Why are US university faculty members reluctant to embrace ‘easy credit transfer’? I think the answer has two parts. The first part has to do with the history of the college curriculum and of grades. The second part has to do with the preparedness of transfer students for learning in different classrooms.

A professor’s primary concern about all aspects of credit transfer is a student’s readiness to learn in the professor’s own classes and seminars. Back when the university curriculum for each field (or ‘major’) was stable and consistent, no matter what the name of the university or college, student transfer was relatively easy. However, ever since World War II, US politicians and US university governing boards have worked to accommodate the standard curriculum to the needs of non-standard students. The non-standard students initially were young men whose educations had been interrupted so that the men could be soldiers; but over time they came to include almost any group that suffered from disadvantages. Because non-standard students sometimes needed special courses before they could succeed in the standard curriculum of their chosen majors, curriculum proliferation began. Suddenly schools were offering an array of credits under non-standardized course titles, a development that was only accelerated by the emergence of community colleges. In addition, economic recovery after the war led to incredible leaps of knowledge, an ongoing reality that has had an enormous effect on university curricula. As part of global recovery, universities in countries with instruction in languages other than English thrived, and often encouraged their graduates to pursue graduate work at US universities. The curricula in different colleges grew in diverse ways, in response to local student needs. Through all of this, grades, once supposedly associated with percentages of students’ knowledge acquisition, began to climb, and to become anything but objective. As a result of all of this, professors’ questions about how to ensure transfer-student preparedness for learning became far more complex.

The solution? For some time it has been increasing reliance on scores from relatively easy-to-administer tests that often accompany transcripts. At the undergraduate level, the most prominent tests have been the SAT and ACT exams; at the graduate level, the most prominent tests are the GRE exams. For international students, another key exam involves English as a Foreign Language.

For a while these exams appeared to meet professors’ concerns with student preparedness. But increasingly, they failed when it came to political and social concerns, particularly with the now-large population of non-standard students. And, increasingly, such exams have themselves failed tests of reliability. The world now has a large industry of ‘cram schools’ with one goal: to increase students’ test scores independent of the targeted underlying skills.
As a result, virtually every American professor has met graduate students who had high TESOL scores but could not comprehend or produce spoken English.

In broad terms, that is how we professors came to lose faith in ‘academic credits.’ We have lost faith in examinations. We are back to relying on local assessments. Students, their parents, and politicians are dismayed. Professional admissions staffs are overworked. Meeting professors’ demands is cumbersome, time-consuming, and costly.

I will end this paper by asking two questions. First, is this concern of professors important? Second, if it is important, what can we do about it?

As to the question of importance, I remind all of us of the title of this conference: *Quality Assurance*. If we—professional administrators, professors, and world citizens—wish to assure the quality of learning in 21st century classrooms, we have to ensure that professors can make their classrooms into learning environments for all the students who are present. The professor’s job, after all, is to teach, especially to teach what relates to his or her research. To some extent our successes as teachers are related to our students’ readiness to learn what we have to teach. Sometimes we find ourselves with students who do not have the knowledge and skills that are prerequisites to what we hope to teach. When that happens, we either ‘water down’ our course or we doom some students to fail. Neither option is pleasant. Neither option promotes quality. If we are committed to high-quality learning in our classrooms, we have also to be committed to ensuring that students are ready to learn in our classrooms.

The commitment to quality leads to my second question: What should we do? Shall we enhance the triple-check transfer standard with additional checks? Or do we need something else?

Few professors claim that the triple-check approach is working. Many may say that it is better than nothing, at least when it involves undergraduates. However, when institutions rely on the standard triple checks for transfer of graduate students, including international transfers, many professors will find that their concern with student preparedness has not been sufficiently addressed.

Why? I will be frank at the risk of sounding brutal. When I have a doctoral class that includes one or two transfer students from other programs, I find myself eager for the new perspectives that they are likely to bring to discussions in class. But when I have a graduate class with five or six transfer students, I am less optimistic. I know that these students are likely to have vastly different academic backgrounds, and varying degrees of preparedness for doing research. Since I want all my students to do well, I will probably have to tutor some of the transfers, because universities do not typically provide centralized tutoring at graduate levels of study. If I assign writing—which is standard procedure in graduate education—I can expect to tutor all of the students who have not done their undergraduate education at an English-language institution. If I find myself in this situation repeatedly, semester after semester, I am likely to find myself with less time for my own research. When that happens, I will eventually come to support Faculty Senate efforts to ‘raise admissions and transfer standards.’ This is not an isolated instance. It has happened at US schools as prominent as Stanford University and the University of Southern California.
Some of you in my audience are undoubtedly saying, 'This speaker is a lazy professor. He doesn’t want to have to spend time with individual students.’ I hope not. I try to give my students the time they need. Occasionally, a few students take up all of my office hours, and I have to add hours to accommodate the rest. However, my experience tells me that no matter how many hours we spend trying to 'get caught up,' some of the transfer students will remain significantly behind. In addition, please remember that half of my job is to advance knowledge by doing original research. It is this part of my job that brings prestige to my home university; it is my accomplishments in research that attract students to my field. Admissions requirements must, therefore, recognize the range of my concerns if the requirements are to support quality.

**An Alternative to Triple Checks: Assessing and Transferring Competencies**

What can we do? Do we add fourth, fifth, and sixth checks? Or are there better ways to promote quality, to require that students show real achievement, to ensure that transfer standards are fair to all concerned, and to support professors’ demands for student preparedness to learn?

Additional checks, it seems to me, will make our already cumbersome and costly procedures more cumbersome.

I do see an alternative. It will not be simple to achieve, and, because it is neither painless nor cheap, it will not be particularly popular among those who experience it. But, given the increasing mobility of world citizens, given the current state of societal need, and given the clear need to provide students with knowledge that they can use for life-long learning, I see no cheap and easy alternative.

What I support grows quite directly from concerns that participants in this Conference have shared. Administrators in higher education no longer only count the number of credits earned and degrees granted when they try to rate themselves or other schools. Administrators today are collectively learning how to use assessment to promote broad-based excellence. We are beginning to learn how to identify and assess less tangible, but more significant, 'outcomes' associated with our courses and programs.

I propose that we do something similar to promote student transfer, mutual recognition, and the quality of student learning. I propose that we phase out the 'academic credit' as our primary vehicle for the measure, transcription, and transfer of student learning. Let us instead measure, transcribe, and transfer student demonstrations of competencies.

I think you all know what I mean by 'competencies.' I am talking about the context-specific knowledge and skills that are intended to result from any particular course of study. Please allow me to illustrate what I mean with three quotations from a Field Review done by the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative under the auspices of the US National Center for Education Statistics. The review is entitled 'Data Ramifications of Competency-Based Initiatives: Interim Report of the Working Group' (December 1999) [http://nces.ed.gov/npec/papers/cbi3.html]
First, the report defines skills, knowledge, and competencies:

Skills and knowledge are acquired through learning experiences; different combinations of skills and knowledge that one has acquired define the competencies that an individual possesses; different combinations of competencies that are possessed by an individual are combined in carrying out different tasks (pp. 4-5).

Second, the review describes relationships between competencies and contexts:

Competence in different contexts requires different bundles of skills and knowledge. Leadership in a surgery suite is different from leadership on the basketball court. For example, motivating teammates is more important to leadership in basketball, while superior knowledge of the procedure is more important to leadership in surgery; but, an ability to effectively coordinate the roles, timing and contributions of co-workers is important to leadership in both contexts. The bundles of different skills and knowledge which are given the same label in different contexts is one reason that there is often difficulty in achieving a common understanding of what a given competency (like leadership) is, and then what it means to assess it.

Knowing how to package the right set of competencies to effectively carry out a given task is in itself a competency (p. 5).

Third, the review highlights the centrality of competency in education and in assessment:

Competency-based initiatives seek to insure that students attain specific skills, knowledge and abilities considered important with respect to whatever they are studying or the transitions for which they are preparing.

Utilizing competencies requires the development of three distinct, but interactive components: a description of the competency; a means of measuring or assessing the competency; and a standard by which someone is judged to be competent (p. 6).

As I am sure you have already realized, achieving what I propose would require a tremendous investment. Certifying competencies rather than counting credits would represent an extraordinary shift in how we 'package' higher education. It would require new forms of assessment relating to courses of study and degrees; it would require new vehicles for the certification of attainment. It would, in short, involve creation of a new currency and a new academic banking system.

The benefits would, I think, more than justify the costs. As a matter of fact, a movement in the direction of what I propose is already underway. The Quality Assurance movement has already led to the articulation of standards and the development of measures that describe learner competence in specified areas. If we want the Quality Assurance movement to have a lasting effect, we now have to translate what we have learned into everyday procedures. And nothing, I think, is more ‘everyday’ in higher education than the ‘paper money’ that students earn and transfer.
In a few places, certifications of competency are already occurring. One such place is Western Governors University (WGU), a US virtual university that grants degrees based exclusively on demonstrations of competency. (WGU does not require courses nor does it award credits.) At the individual-requirement level, nothing in my experience exceeds the quality of standards and assessments articulated by Western Governors University (http://www.wgu.edu/wgu/index.html).

Interestingly, WGU provides us with a case study on what might be involved in a total overhaul of the academic banking system. The paradigm from which WGU operates has attracted business interest and investment. However, the novelty of that same paradigm in education has slowed WGU’s acceptance by other educational institutions. In addition, WGU, perhaps because the stakes are so high, sought to be accredited not by one, but by five US accrediting agencies operating jointly. As I write this, WGU is on the verge of winning joint accreditation. When it does, we can look to it for further lessons on total overhaul in higher education.

At the degree level, competency demonstrations are for the moment associated primarily with licensure in areas such as architecture, law, medicine, and dentistry. (WGU also provides some provocative combinations of competencies and assessments for degrees, but only in a few areas.) Increasingly, licensing agencies require applicants to submit portfolios of their work: in a very real way, the ‘portfolio movement’ in educational assessment has been a step toward what I here espouse. In fact, I predict that in the future students will send out electronic portfolios that demonstrate competencies in the same way that my generation once sent out transcripts that list courses taken.

What I here propose will of course be costly to develop, but in the long run it would probably be less expensive to administer than is the present triple- (often quadruple-) check system of credit and degree transfers.

What I propose should help us to develop approaches to transfer and recognition that are truly trans-national. It seems fairer to individuals than is the hodge-podge of existing vehicles. And it seems more consistent with what we know of 21st century societal needs than does our 19th century credit system.

What I propose has the potential to vastly increase the number of educational-opportunity providers: both private industry and existing schools can provide competency-focused educational opportunities, while only accredited schools can grant credits.

Finally, what I propose—a focus on what a graduate can do with what she or he knows, not on how many courses he or she has taken—is the best way I know of to assure quality in education. It will promote quality in graduates’ professional work. And, with proper nurturing, it will promote quality in the behavior of world citizens.

From the perspective of this professor, we can afford to seek nothing less.
A Proposal for the Cooperation between Universities in China and Thailand

By

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July 1, 2000 is the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relationship between China and Thailand. Just as Mr. Deng Xiaoping said in 1989, the success of the development of the friendly relationship between China and Thailand is a fine model of cooperation between countries with different social systems. During these years, leaders of both countries visited each other many times. Take last year as an example, in 1999 President Jiang Zemin visited Thailand, while Princess Siring Tong from Thailand paid her ninth visit to China and the Thai Premier visited the country in the same year. These official visits greatly promoted the bilateral and multi-layered cooperation between the two countries in the fields of politics, economy, military affairs and culture. On this basis, it is very important and necessary to study the ways of higher educational exchanges, to plan for the further exchange in the 21st Century, to work out the details of certain specific projects, and to promote and develop higher education between China and Thailand.

The Necessity of the Exchanges in the Field of Higher Education between China and Thailand

We can see that it is highly necessary to promote the exchanges in the field of Higher Education between China and Thailand. I would like to present my reasons for the development in the following aspects:

1. The exchanges between the two countries in the field of higher education are sure to facilitate the development of the friendly relationship and will consolidate the companionship that has lasted a long time.

As we all know, mutual understanding is the basis for friendship between two countries. The cooperation between the two countries in the field of tertiary education not only strengthens the ties between the academic circles of both countries, but also opens a window for peoples of the two countries to look at each other with an increasing popularization of higher education. Furthermore, seen from a perspective for the future development, we hold the world belongs to young people, while higher education institutes are places to cultivate and improve young people. Therefore, the mutual understanding and constant exchanges between the young people of the two countries are the guarantee of a friendly relationship in the 21st century.

2. These exchanges will promote the economic cooperation between the two countries.

Education is an enterprise. Exchanges between the two countries can bring about many benefits. For one thing, it can optimize the educational resources and facilitates and bring
them into full play through the exchanges of scholars and teachers. Secondly, we can study the advantages with each other and extend the market of education through the exchange of students. Thirdly, we can enhance the power for intense international competition between China and Thailand. Therefore, these exchanges will bring about the international development of education in some fields.

Seen from the perspective of intellectual economy, the exchanges between the two countries will present opportunities for business on both sides. As we know, good and new techniques more often than not are born in universities and colleges. The cooperation between universities of the two countries will not only push the advance of techniques, but also benefit the adjustment and upgrading of the structures of the enterprise of the two countries, and will stimulate the sustained development of the economy in both countries. On the other hand, higher education institutes are centers for businessmen. The exchanges and cooperation between the two countries will establish a tie between businessmen from both countries, and will create chances for them to gain knowledge of each other's markets, which, in turn, will help cooperation and the development for both sides.

3. These exchanges will promote the cultural understanding between the two countries.

The friendly exchange between China and Thailand has had a long history. Exchanges in the educational field will no doubt promote cultural exchanges, as higher learning institutes spread knowledge and information about native cultures.

4. The exchanges will benefit educational and cultural cooperation between China and Eastern Asian countries.

China has long paid close attention to the maintenance of friendly relationships with its neighboring countries. It has always been one of the objectives that the Chinese government pursues and develops cooperation with Southeastern countries in the fields of economics and culture. However, we have had clashes due to certain historical causes such as the problems of borders and sea-lanes. The corporation between China and Thailand in the fields of higher education will give a leading edge and will exert a positive influence to the other Southeast Asian countries. Besides, the cordial relationships between China and Thailand will improve the relationship between China and other Southeast countries, as Thailand is a member of the Eastern Asian Association, in which it plays an important part in economic integration. To strengthen the ways of higher educational cooperation between China and Thailand, we can speed up the cooperation with other countries in East Asian Association.

The Cooperation between China and Thailand in the Field of Higher Education: Status quo and Problems

1. Status quo

In order to promote the educational exchanges between the two countries, in March 1989 Chinese and Thai Governments signed the Memorandum of Cooperation and Understanding between the two countries in the field of higher education because of the good relationship between the two countries. It is clear that the leaders of both countries have reached an agreement in this aspect.
During the 25 years since the establishment of the diplomatic relationship between the two countries, exchanges have taken place at different levels of educational institutes. Take Yunnan Normal University for example, it has established friendly relations with several Thai universities, such as Chulalongkorn University, Rajabhat Institute of Lampang, and IDEA. About 500 teachers and staff members have visited Thailand.

As for exchange between teachers, Beijing University and Chulalongkorn University have signed agreements. Therefore, the former sends teachers to the latter to teach Chinese every year. Yunnan Normal University sends teachers to Rajabhat Institute of Lampang to teach English every year.

In the aspect of student exchanges, every year the Chinese government gives scholarships to two students in Chulalongkorn University to study in Beijing University of Foreign Languages and Cultures. Besides, faculty members of the Chinese Department of Chulalongkorn University and University of General Trade Union visit Beijing every year. China also sends students to study Thai in Thai universities. Both Chinese and Thai universities admit students from each other.

In academic exchanges, Zhongshan University in Guangzhou and Chulalongkorn University jointly conducted the study of Chinese in Thailand. Exchanges between China and Thailand in the fields of higher education have developed rapidly in recent years and this lays a solid foundation for further corporation between the two countries.

2. Problems

(a) Visits need more 'depth'

Most visitors paid very short visits to the other country. This means a superficial understanding through a cursory survey and lack of in-depth studies. The problem is more severe on the part of China. As we know, when a planned economy is in transition to a market economy, higher learning institutes face a critical moment of change. These are the problems facing Chinese universities: how to educate in a market economy. In this respect, Thai universities are great examples for us to follow as they have run their universities in a market economy, such as collecting funds, setting up curricula, and administrating school affairs. Universities in Thailand have already opened their doors to the world and have been internationalized to a great extent.

(b) Subjects of cooperation need to be broadened.

Exchanges between the two countries are mainly confined to languages, and while exchanges in other fields need to be implemented.

This reveals the low level in the internalization of higher education in China. In recent years, Chinese teachers teach Chinese abroad or take foreign students to study Chinese in China. The reason is that in China there are no international schools in which teachers teach every subject in English or in any other languages. Chinese universities which offer special courses or subjects to keep abreast with the world find recruiting foreign students difficult. This severely limits the scope of cooperation between the two countries in the field of higher education.
(c) The lack of long-term projects.

Most Thai students study in China for two or three months rather than complete their academic degrees there. That is partly due to a shortage of funds, the Chinese government cannot afford to supply large amounts for scholarships to Thai students, and partly because there is a limited number of subjects offered to foreign students.

(d) Lacking in joint research projects

In past years of our cooperation, we have a greater exchange among language teachers and students. Other subjects, both humanities and science, require more concentration of effort. There is a lack of understanding on both sides. In fact, both Chinese and Thai scientists and scholars have their own strengths.

The above problems are hopefully to be solved in the new century.

Proposals for exchange in the fields of higher education between the two countries

1. I would propose that we establish such organizations as 'Forum' for university presidents from both countries, and 'Associations' of educational and cultural exchanges between the two countries to secure the healthy growth of the relationship and a down-to-earth implementation of plans and projects.

The 'Forum' or 'Association' can hold meetings annually, while the venues for the meetings can alternate between China and Thailand. University presidents can decide whether they should attend the meeting on their own and can serve as chairmen of the meetings in turn. Annual meetings can take the following topics for their discussion:

- Exchanges of information and experience;
- Examinations of joint projects;
- Plans for new programs.

2. Enhancement of internalization of higher education in China and Thailand and participation in competitions in worldwide education markets.

To enhance the internalization of higher education in China and Thailand, first of all, we need to increase the numbers of students in both countries. As a matter of fact, China and Thailand have many subjects to complement each other. Chinese universities have their own academic strength while Thai universities also have theirs. And to a certain degree, universities in Thailand can offer opportunities for the Chinese students who cannot enter universities in China due to the limited resources in higher learning institutes. Therefore, both countries can take the opportunities to increase the numbers of students to be enrolled and broaden the subjects to attract foreign students. In order for healthy development of the exchanges, both countries should adopt effective methods to assure orderly management of these exchanges. The exchanges between the students, I am sure, can speed up the internationalization of higher institutes in both universities and will sharpen the power of competition in the worldwide education markets.
In addition, universities of both countries can design research projects, such as studies of Chinese in Southeast Asia, agricultural techniques for tropical and semitropical areas, and management in tourism and hotels. Besides we can also have exchanges in sports and arts. All these exchanges are sure to bring positive changes in the fields of politics, economy and culture.

3. Cultivation of young people for future exchanges

As neighboring countries, China and Thailand have increasing exchanges in the fields of politics, economy, culture and military affairs. With the modernization of Thailand, it has a greater number of exchanges with Singapore and Taiwan Province, China. In recent years, the Thais have showed increasing enthusiasm for the Chinese language. Therefore, universities in China should give firm support to the Chinese programs in Thailand. In addition to the language learning, Chinese universities can also supply such courses as Chinese medicine, Chinese history and culture, and Chinese Martial Arts. Only by so doing can we produce and build up a reserve of personnel for future exchanges.

On the other hand, Chinese higher learning institutes should also promote the programs in the Thai language and culture thereby cultivating talents, which meet the requirements of future development of Southeast Asia. That is of vital importance for reform and the opening up of China as well as for the sustained development of the friendly relations between the two countries.
The Advantage of Building up Bases in Yunnan Province for Exchanges

Yunnan province has advantages for exchanges in the following aspects:

- Advantage in geographical location - Yunnan is situated at the pass to the Southeast Asian countries. It is convenient to come and go between China and Thailand from there.

- Advantages in national cultures - People from the Dai nationality in Xishuangbanna in Yunnan and the Thai people stem from the same origin. They have many things in common, such as languages, cultures, and customs.

- Foundations for economic cooperation - Yunnan has conducted many exchange programs with Thailand since the establishment of the diplomatic relationship between two countries.

- Support from the government - The Central Government of the People's Republic of China has officially acknowledged that Yunnan is a pass that leads to Southeast countries from China. This means that Yunnan province has changed from its former perceived disadvantageous location to an advantageous position. Furthermore, this also regulates the leading direction for Yunnan province. At present, the Central Government has put forward strategies to develop the west parts of China. Opportunities have therefore come about for the people in Yunnan to accelerate exchange with its neighboring countries.

Exchanges between China and Thailand in the field of higher education presents excellent opportunities to show Yunnan Education to the world. Yunnan should become a base for:

- Centers of learning Thai Language. As we know, both Yunnan University and Yunnan Minority Institute offer the course now;

- Centers of training Thai students to become Chinese teachers and Chinese teachers could work in Thailand;

- Centers for scientific cooperation, such as in the field of crop growing in tropical and semi-tropical areas;

- Centers of Thai studies. In Yunnan there are such institutes that concentrate on study, such as the Research Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, the Yunnan Social Science Academy. The History Department of Yunnan Normal University offers Southeast Asian courses for MA candidates who major in world history and focus their attention on Southeast Asian studies.

All in all, speeding up the cooperation of higher education between China and Thailand will greatly promote the development of two countries.
The Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework

By

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This paper provides an overview of quality assurance in the Australian higher education sector. It includes a short historical overview of quality assurance in Australian higher education and a description of Australia’s current multi-faceted quality assurance framework. The paper covers the various roles of the higher education sector, the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, as well as covering two joint initiatives; the Australian Qualifications Framework and the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA). This paper is timely, as Australian Governments represented on the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) endorsed in March 2000 the establishment of the Australian Universities Quality Agency and the adoption of National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes (National Protocols 2000). These two initiatives have been introduced to ensure that the higher education sector maintains and enhances its quality in an increasingly competitive environment, and they are discussed in some detail within the paper.

Introduction

Throughout the world there has been a move to mass higher education, associated with greater diversity of institutions and programmes and a large increase in the number and size of universities. This has also given rise to a variety of modes of course delivery, including franchising arrangements with third parties under which the parent institution may exercise limited control. The increasing incidence of virtual course delivery, and of franchising or agency arrangements with third parties, or through satellite campuses at a substantial distance from a major campus, pose challenges for the efficacy of institutional quality controls.

In addition to the changes to the higher education sector referred to above, other new pressures are emerging both nationally and internationally. In a policy environment that encourages universities to seek greater commercial opportunities and align themselves more closely with industry needs, universities are facing a competitive future. Efforts by the higher education sector to attract business investment rely to a considerable extent on available evidence attesting to the quality of their service and the skill level of their graduates. Formal, transparent and credible systems of quality assurance are important both nationally and internationally.

Governments and institutions considering education relationships with another country, and families considering personal education investment in that country, must have confidence in the quality of the universities and in the quality and reputation of their degrees.

These changes in organisation, scale and modes of delivery have led to increased public concern about the maintenance of programme quality. In response, many countries have taken
steps to establish mechanisms for quality assurance in higher education. Governments must justify spending on higher education in competition with other demands for public spending. Communities whose taxes must support the system and individuals who need to be satisfied about the value and portability of their credentials all demand external validation of the quality of their investments.

Development of Quality Assurance in Australia

The Australian higher education sector experienced large scale structural reorganisation in the late 1980s, and rapid growth in higher education participation from the early 1990s. Given this, the Commonwealth Government was concerned to assure the community that the quality of higher education in Australia was of an appropriately high standard and that it would be maintained and enhanced.

The 1980’s was the decade of concern for efficiency and effectiveness of higher education institutions, for public accountability and self evaluation. Since the late 1970’s institutions have been encouraged to monitor their performance. The Commonwealth Government promoted a climate of critical self-assessment across the higher education sector. From the mid 1980s greater emphasis was placed on system-wide studies. Major discipline reviews were funded to determine standards and to improve quality and efficiency. While these reviews served to highlight the importance of quality assurance within institutions and across the sector, there was no mechanism to ensure that the recommendations of the reviews were acted upon at the institutional level.

In its 1991 policy statement, Higher Education: Quality and Diversity in the 1990s (Baldwin 1991) the Government sought to address the weaknesses of the discipline review approach to quality assurance. The statement announced a comprehensive set of measures to enhance the quality of higher education teaching and research. A major initiative was the provision of funding, additional to institutional operating grants, to those universities able to demonstrate a high level of quality assurance in the context of their missions and goals.

The Government established the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in November 1992 to provide advice on quality assurance issues, conduct independent audits of institutional quality assurance policies and procedures, and to make recommendations to the Government on the allocation of annual quality-related funds. These funds were made available to institutions from 1994.

Three rounds of independent whole of institution audits were performed under the auspices of the Quality Assurance Programme between 1993 – 1995. The voluntary self-assessment undertaken by institutions under this Programme fostered an enhanced and enduring awareness of the importance of internal quality assurance and triggered considerable change in institutional systems as procedural gaps were identified and outcomes measured. In fact, the audit programme served as a mechanism for change. Rather than providing a snapshot of current activities as the discipline reviews had, this holistic approach had the advantage of involving much of the university in a self-analysis and it evaluated policy and hence commitment to the future (Committee for Quality Assurance 1994, 1995a, and 1995b).

In early 1998, after wide consultation, the Government integrated quality improvement into its yearly funding negotiations with institutions. Quality Assurance and Improvement Plans were
required of universities from 1998 onwards and are published annually by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA). These Plans are expected to contain goals and strategies to maintain and improve quality assurance in the key areas of teaching and learning, research, management and community service and they focus on outcomes.

In April 1999 Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers of Education, meeting as the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, referred the issue of a common approach to higher education accreditation criteria and procedures to a committee of higher education officials from the State, Territory and Commonwealth departments of education (Allen 1999). The committee’s deliberations were informed by developments in quality assurance in the higher education sector in Australia in the 1980’s and 1990’s, as well as by developments in the international arena (Anderson et al. 2000; and Harman and Meek 2000).

The committee recognised the strength of the current quality assurance arrangements and sought to build on that strength. It recognised the need for common accreditation processes across all States and Territories and the need to independently evaluate those accreditation processes, as well as the internal quality management processes adopted by universities. The committee presented its advice to Ministers in March 2000 and made two recommendations: that Ministers endorse the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes and agree to the establishment of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA). Both recommendations were accepted by Ministers and were integrated into the Australian quality assurance framework.
As outlined diagrammatically above, the framework encompasses the roles of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), the universities, government and of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA). The following pages detail these elements of the framework beginning with the Australian Qualifications Framework.

The Australian Qualifications Framework

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was established by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs in 1995 to provide for national articulation of awards offered in the Australian vocational education and training and higher education sectors. The AQF also maintains a public register of Council endorsed post-compulsory education providers and accreditation authorities. The higher education institutions and accreditation authorities on the AQF registers have the full endorsement of Australian Education Ministers represented on the Council and as such, the list protects the integrity of Australian higher education.
The Universities

Australian universities are established by or under Commonwealth, State or Territory legislation. They have the authority to accredit their own programmes, and have primary responsibility for their own academic standards as well as the quality assurance processes which underpin them. The capacity to responsibly exercise this authority is among the criteria for recognition as a university in Australia.

The relevant legislation vests responsibility for governance and management in a governing body in the form of a Council or Senate, which is accountable to the Federal, State or Territory Government. The governing bodies are generally composed of the Chancellor, senior academics including the Chair of the Academic Board, as well as external members, government appointees and staff and student representatives.

All universities develop annual Quality Assurance and Improvement Plans. The Plans are an integral part of the institutional planning process. They indicate the institution’s goals, outline strategies and report on outcomes. They provide a definition of the attributes of the university’s graduates and include a range of outcomes information.

Universities have internal processes to ensure quality in the areas of admissions, teaching and learning and assessment. There are processes to assess new course proposals and to monitor and evaluate course curriculum on a continuous basis, including regular evaluation of student feedback. These mechanisms involve consultation with, and often accreditation by, relevant industry or professional bodies in addition to formal assessment by the university. Normally courses are subject to review on a five yearly basis.

External bodies play an integral role in assuring the continuing high quality of higher education in Australia. It has become common practice in Australian universities to arrange for professional associations to perform programme reviews in fields such as accountancy, engineering, architecture, dentistry and pharmacy. Professional accreditation bodies examine the general structure and content of curriculum, academic standards and course length. They establish general expectations concerning entry level to courses, practical experience, subjects to be covered and mode of study. This process enables universities to compare the quality of their academic activities with other institutions, and to ensure that their graduates are well equipped to operate at the leading edge of their profession.

Universities also cooperate with each other to provide external evaluation of honours degrees and higher degrees by research, as well as peer reviews in the competitive grants process. It is common practice to use international examiners in the evaluation of higher degrees. Many universities participate in national and international networks and benchmarking projects undertaken by those networks.

Different arrangements are in place among Australian universities for the assessment and improvement of staff teaching and research. Institutions undertake student evaluation of teaching, develop special projects for the improvement of teaching and offer internal awards for teaching excellence. Promotion criteria normally focuses on the quality of teaching, research activity, and community service contributions. Most institutions have entered into relationships with other Australian and international universities to facilitate staff exchanges, collaboration in research, and benchmarking of course delivery standards.
Where an Australian university or other self-accrediting institution operates in a distant location and issues an award under its own name, the Council or governing body of the university or institution is responsible for quality assurance. For its overseas campuses the institutions are expected to maintain standards at least equivalent to those provided in Australia regardless of any specific requirements of overseas governments. Universities are also expected to ensure the standards of courses provided through franchising and other arrangements in which the university is not directly delivering the course. Where there are serious concerns about the quality of delivery the arrangements may be subject to review by State or Territory Governments.

State and Territory Governments

Australian State and Territory Governments have a number of responsibilities in respect of quality assurance in higher education. These responsibilities were standardised by the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes that were endorsed by Australian Education Ministers in March 2000. Before this time the processes employed by the States and Territories varied. The Protocols were designed to ensure consistent criteria and standards across Australia covering the recognition of new universities and accreditation of higher education courses, delivery arrangements for higher education courses involving other organisations, the operation of overseas higher education institutions in Australia, and the endorsement of higher education courses for overseas students.

Establishment and recognition of universities

State and Territory governments have responsibility for approving applications from institutions wishing to operate as universities within their State or Territory.

To establish a common standard and process for the recognition of universities across Australia, the Protocols specified a common definition of an Australian university, being 'an institution which meets nationally agreed criteria and is established or recognised as a university under State, Territory or Commonwealth legislation'.

An Australian university must demonstrate the following features:

- authorisation by law to award higher education qualifications across a range of fields and to set standards for those qualifications which are equivalent to Australian and international standards;
- teaching and learning that engages with advanced knowledge and inquiry;
- a culture of sustained scholarship extending from that which informs inquiry and basic teaching and learning, to the creation of new knowledge through research, and original creative endeavour;
- commitment of teachers, researchers, course designers and assessors to free inquiry and the systematic advancement of knowledge;
- governance, procedural rules, organisation, admission policies, financial arrangements and quality assurance processes, which are underpinned by the values and goals outlined above, and which are sufficient to ensure the integrity of the institution's academic programmes; and
sufficient financial and other resources to enable the institution's programme to be delivered and sustained into the future.

Delivery arrangements involving other organisations

The Protocols detail the powers of State and Territory Ministers over institutions that have a campus in their jurisdiction, yet are based elsewhere. Where the Minister in a State or Territory in which a campus is operating has serious concerns about the quality of delivery and, following consultation with the Minister in the State or Territory where the institution is established, an independent review may be conducted.

The review will enable the State or Territory Government to:

- establish conditions for the continuation of activities within the State of Territory;
- require that the operations of the institution within the State or Territory occur under the academic supervision of another institution; or
- close the campus and cease providing programmes in that State or Territory.

The Protocols also confirm that institutions offering an award, regardless of whether they have used curricula and materials supplied by another institution, will be subject to the accreditation requirements of the State or Territory in which they operate.

Accreditation of higher education courses to be offered by non-self-accrediting institutions

Non-university providers wishing to offer courses leading to higher education awards are subject to regulation in the States and Territories. Mutual recognition arrangements are in place between jurisdictions, and providers may apply for courses to be offered concurrently in two or more States or Territories.

Higher education courses offered by non self-accrediting providers must:

- satisfy the award level requirements set by the AQF;
- be comparable to courses at the same level at Australian universities;
- successfully deliver at the level proposed; and
- providers must have appropriate financial and other arrangements to permit successful delivery of the course, and must be fit and proper to accept responsibility for the course.
Recognition of overseas higher education institutions

An overseas higher education institution refers to a university or other recognised higher education provider whose legal origin is in a country other than Australia. To gain approval to operate in an Australian jurisdiction, an overseas institution must meet the following criteria. The institution must demonstrate that:

- it is a bona fide institution, legally established in its country of origin;
- the courses to be offered have been properly accredited in the provider’s country of origin by an authority that, in the opinion of the Australian jurisdiction’s decision-maker, is the appropriate authority;
- where the standing of the institution's accreditation status is not acceptable to the decision-maker, the decision-maker may require the proposed courses to be subject to a full accreditation process;
- the course or courses are comparable in requirements and learning outcomes to a course at the same level in a similar field in Australia;
- the delivery arrangements, including the arrangements for academic guidance and quality assurance proposed by the overseas institution are comparable to those offered by accredited Australian providers; and
- appropriate financial and other arrangements exist to permit the successful delivery of the course in the Australian jurisdiction.

Protection of the word 'university'

Until recently, it was taken for granted that a university in Australia was an institution established by specific legislation. All States and mainland Territories of Australia have legislative or procedural arrangements which effectively require an institution wishing to operate as a university in their jurisdiction to be established by the mechanism of a legislative instrument.

To protect the standing of Australian universities nationally and internationally, the title ‘university’ is now protected in two ways:

- by protection of the title ‘university’ in business names/associations legislation, and in Commonwealth Corporations Law; and
- by establishment in all Australian jurisdictions of a legislative framework specifying consistent criteria and procedures by which an institution/organisation may use the title ‘university’.

Endorsement of courses for overseas students

Since 1991 it has been the responsibility of State and Territory Governments under the Commonwealth Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act, to endorse courses of study as suitable for overseas students. This endorsement is accepted by the Commonwealth for the purpose of issuing visas to students.
For the protection of students and the international reputation of Australian awards, this endorsement is only given where the endorsing authority has confidence that the courses concerned are offered at a standard equivalent to other programmes of a similar kind, that facilities and services are of adequate standard, and that the organisation providing the programme has the financial and other resources to ensure full and effective delivery of the programme.

The endorsement of courses for overseas students is given by the State or Territory where the course is to be delivered.

Endorsement of higher education courses for overseas students is only given by, or following advice from, State or Territory officers responsible for accreditation and the approval of higher education awards. If the course is to be offered in special circumstances such as at a distant location or through an agent, the endorsing authority requires that particular concerns be met.

The authority must be satisfied that:

- the special circumstances will be made clear to students before enrolment;
- the facilities and services are of adequate standard for the courses offered;
- in the case of delivery through an agent, the teaching staff are adequately qualified, effective quality assurance measures are in place, and appropriate guarantees by the principal institution are given for the protection of students; and
- the endorsement of the course is not transferable to another provider.

Where a course is to be offered by an institution other than a university or other self-accrediting institution there are also particular requirements.

- the course should be accredited according to the guidelines specified for non self-accrediting institutions, and the institution must have approval to offer the course in that jurisdiction; and
- the endorsement of the course is not transferable to another provider.

This Protocol will be supported by a National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students, which is currently being developed by DETYA. The Code seeks to provide a nationally consistent and legally enforceable framework for the registration of providers of education and training to overseas students on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students.

The Commonwealth Government

The Commonwealth Government, through the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, plays a key role in the quality assurance framework. It substantially funds universities, monitors and publishes performance data and provides the sector with a range of tools and incentives to enhance the quality of outcomes.

Commonwealth funding for higher education, with some minor exceptions, is provided as a triennial funding agreement under the Higher Education Funding Act 1988. Integral to higher education funding in Australia is an accountability framework. As established under the Act, publicly funded institutions must annually submit an 'educational profile' to the
Commonwealth that outlines their strategies to achieve outcomes in a variety of key areas, information regarding previous and projected student load, as well as a detailed financial report. A condition of receipt of operating funding is that institutions must spend financial assistance received only in accordance with the educational profile provided to the Commonwealth.

Through the profile process the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs collects an array of information from universities. Information provided in preparation for these meetings enables the Department to review the performance of institutions on a number of levels, and provides a means of assessing their resource needs. As part of the profiles process each institution is required to submit plans in the areas of quality assurance, research, indigenous education and equity. The Commonwealth publishes annually universities’ Quality Assurance and Improvement Plans, Indigenous Education and Equity Plans and from 2001, the Research and Research Training Management Plans.

**Quality assurance and improvement plans**

As indicated above, since 1998 all triennially-funded institutions have been required to submit a Quality Assurance and Improvement Plan to the Commonwealth as part of the educational profiles process. The plans outline the university’s goals and aims in the key areas of teaching and learning, research, management and community service. Each institution is required to provide detail on the strategies that have been adopted to achieve their goals, the indicators used to assess their success, and include outcomes on a number of measures.

The plans are expected to include the outcomes data from two national surveys which assess the employment success of recent graduates, as well as graduate perceptions of teaching. The plans have enabled the Commonwealth to report to the wider community on the quality and quality assurance processes of Australian universities. More importantly they are a means of public accountability in the area of quality assurance for Australia’s publicly funded universities, and enable students to make more informed choices about the institution that best suits their particular needs.

**Performance management tools**

The Commonwealth Government provides tools, incentives and information to encourage the improvement of outcomes within Australian universities. It recently funded the development of a benchmarking manual for higher education institutions (Benchmarking 2000). The manual provides 67 benchmarks against which universities may wish to assess themselves against like institutions. The benchmarks cover the spectrum of university activities from teaching and learning to research, finances, internal management and internationalisation.

A system wide survey of the employment success of students after graduation, known as the Graduate Destination Survey, has been conducted since the 1970’s by the Graduate Careers Council of Australia. The Commonwealth Government funds the survey and institutions provide the necessary administrative support. The survey is completed by graduates four months after completion of their courses. It provides information on the proportion of graduates in full time employment (including industry, occupation and salary level) and full time study (including level and field) from each institution. The Survey provides valuable comparative information to the public, and useful benchmarking information to universities themselves to help them assess the success of their graduates in the competitive labour
market. GDS data are also published annually by Commonwealth Government in the *Quality Assurance and Improvement Plans*.

The Commonwealth funds the annual undergraduate Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) as well as the newer Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ). Both of these student surveys are disseminated by the Graduate Careers Council and are a valuable source of information on student perceptions of their experiences at university. The Course Experience Questionnaire covers teaching, goals and standards, workload, assessment, generic skills and overall satisfaction. The Commonwealth is currently funding the development of additional scales for the CEQ which will measure broader aspects of student experience in the areas of student support, learning resources, learning community, graduate qualities and intellectual motivation.

The Post Graduate Research Experience Questionnaire was created by the Australian Council for Educational Research in conjunction with the Graduate Careers Council and was administered nationally for the first time in 1999. It measures research graduates’ satisfaction with supervision, skills development, intellectual climate, infrastructure, thesis examination and goals. Both CEQ and PREQ data are collected from institutions annually as part of the profiles process and are included in their *Quality Assurance and Improvement Plans*.

Another Commonwealth-funded instrument to measure performance is the Graduate Skills Assessment (GSA), which has been designed to assess the generic skills of university graduates. This voluntary instrument, developed by the Australian Council for Educational Research, tests the generic skills of university students, both at point of entry to and exit from university. The components of the test are critical thinking, problem-solving, interpersonal understanding and written communication. The GSA was piloted in early 2000 with the assistance of universities and was taken in late 2000 for the first time by graduating Australian students. At entry level the test might be used by institutions to assist poorly performing students. At exit level the results could be used by institutions to determine graduate entry and by employers to make judgements about generic skills for employment purposes. The GSA could also be used to measure the value added by institutions or to compare the differences in student profile between fields of study.

The Commonwealth publishes *The Characteristics and Performance of Higher Education Institutions* which provides a range of indicators which illustrate the diversity of the sector. The indicators cover student characteristics, staff, research, finances, as well as some outcome measures. These measures include retention rates and the graduate outcome data referred to earlier.

Outcomes data are used by institutions to review their own performance (benchmarking within and across institutions) and by the Commonwealth to monitor quality across the higher education sector. The data are included in commercial student guides and help to inform student choice.

**Programmes to support quality**

The Commonwealth Government established the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC) in 2000 as part of its commitment to promoting quality and excellence in university teaching and learning in Australia.
The Committee has been briefed to:

- identify emerging issues in teaching and learning in Australian universities and propose strategies for dealing with these issues;
- identify and support effective methods of enhancing learning;
- encourage dissemination and adoption of these methods across the Australian university sector;
- promote collaboration and exchange of information in teaching and learning both nationally and internationally; and encourage and foster innovation in higher education teaching and learning; and
- manage the prestigious Australian Awards for University Teaching.

The Australian Universities Quality Agency

The elements of the quality assurance framework discussed above were developed and refined largely over the last two decades. However, universities and governments recognised the need for a means of independently verifying these quality assurance arrangements and agreed to the establishment of a new audit agency (Anderson et al. 2000; and Harman and Meek 2000).

The establishment of the AUQA was endorsed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs in March 2000 as an independent national agency to monitor, audit, and report on quality assurance in Australian higher education. The new agency will commence its audits in 2001.

The Agency is responsible for:

- conducting quality audits of self-accrediting institutions and State and Territory accreditation authorities on a five yearly basis;
- providing public reports revealing the outcomes of these audits;
- reporting on the criteria for the accreditation of new universities and non-university higher education awards, as a result of information obtained during the audits of institutions and State and Territory accreditation processes; and
- reporting on the relative standards and international standing of the Australian higher education system and its quality assurance processes, as a result of information obtained during the audit process.

Audits of the State and Territory higher education accreditation authorities will pay particular attention to their processes, consistency with agreed higher education quality standards, and consistency with comparable judgements made in other States and Territories.

Academic audits of self-accrediting institutions will be whole of institution audits based on a self-assessment. They will focus on the key areas of teaching and learning, research and
management and on the adequacy of an institution’s quality assurance arrangements. They will assess the institution’s success in maintaining standards consistent with university education in Australia. The Agency will make use of panels of experts with substantial senior academic and administrative experience in higher education to undertake the audits.

The Agency will not have responsibility for investigating complaints about institutions or accrediting agencies. Action taken in response to negative audit reports will be the responsibility of the governing body of the institution concerned or in the case of State and Territory accreditation authorities, of the relevant Department and Minister. However, reports will be publicly available and failure to respond appropriately to negative reports might result in funding sanctions by the Commonwealth or regulatory action by the relevant State or Territory.

The Agency is an independent not-for-profit company owned by members of the Ministerial Council. It operates independently of governments under the direction of an appropriately structured Board of Directors. The Agency receives funding from the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and the costs of audits are to be met by the entities subject to audit.

The Board has a membership of:

- five persons elected by the CEOs of higher education institutions; four by self-accrediting institutions including universities, and one by non self-accrediting providers of higher education courses;
- six persons nominated by Ministers; three by the Commonwealth Education Minister and three by State and Territory Higher Education Ministers; and
- a Chief Executive.

The first Chair of the Board was nominated by the Commonwealth Minister, and subsequent Chairs will be elected by the Board.

**Conclusion**

This brief examination of quality assurance arrangements in Australian higher education does not seek to provide an exhaustive description of action that is occurring across the sector in quality assurance and improvement. It seeks to provide a snapshot of the broad quality assurance framework for the benefit of interested parties in Australia or overseas.

The Australian Qualifications Framework provides award descriptors and a list of Ministerial Council endorsed accreditation authorities and accredited universities. It helps maintain the quality and integrity of Australian higher education.

At an institutional level there are a variety of quality assurance arrangements in place. Institutions are assisted in the task of quality improvement and assurance by the accreditation activities of professional bodies and registration boards, by the Australian Vice Chancellors’ Committee’s (AVCC) various codes of practice and guidelines, and by the contributions of employers to the identification of skills needed by graduates to perform effectively in the world of work.
The Quality Assurance and Improvement Plans submitted for the 1999-2001 triennium show that Australian universities have developed a number of approaches to assuring and improving the quality of what they do. Within a diverse higher education system, quality management is becoming an increasingly important part of the strategic planning process and institutions are highly conscious of the need to deliver optimal outcomes in a competitive national and global environment. That Australian graduates are performing successfully in a demanding and dynamic labour market is a strong indication that our universities are succeeding in this endeavour.

State and Territory Governments are responsible for the legislative arrangements which protect the integrity of Australian universities and higher education award nomenclature. At the national level, the Commonwealth Government monitors progress across the sector and reports publicly on the quality of the system, to help potential students make informed choices and to provide the necessary assurances to the national and international community about the standards of Australia’s universities. The Commonwealth actively encourages enhanced performance through initiatives such as the Australian Universities Teaching Committee and the development of sector-wide efficiency and effectiveness indicators.

The new Australian Universities Quality Agency will audit universities and accreditation authorities to verify the quality of the system.

Overall, Australia has a robust but flexible approach to quality assurance. It recognises that our universities are diverse organisations which best meet the challenge of maintaining and enhancing the quality of their provision if they are able to operate in a framework of government encouragement without unnecessary intervention. Within this framework, universities are expected to engage in a pro-active, rigorous and ongoing process of planning and self-assessment which will enable them to ensure the quality outcomes expected by their students and the wider community.
References


Introduction

Dramatic increases have occurred in the number of private higher education institutions, with accompanying diversification in structures, curriculum and teaching methods and management approaches resulting from both internal factors (such as changes in academic disciplines and new instructional methods) and external factors (such as population growth, the need to cater for more diverse clienteles and changing labour market requirements).’.  

The emergence of private higher education institutions in Thailand is one of the government's most significant achievements by any standard. Credit Transfer and Mutual Recognition are timely and relevant topics for study and discussion at this conference on ‘Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Standards, Mechanisms and Mutual Recognition.’ In Thailand's situation, the rationale for Credit Transfer emanates from the Private College Act of 1969, and the Private Higher Education Act of 1979 as amended in 1992, and their implications.

Historical Background

Before 1969 higher education in Thailand constituted a State monopoly, the sole prerogative of government agencies. Towards the end of the 1960s, there was a steadily growing demand for higher education. Public universities in those days could no longer cope with such an enormous increase in demand owing to lack of space and other facilities in their institutions. To solve the problem, the government then launched two open public universities, one in 1971 and the other in 1978, to which to the present day admission is unlimited and without any restraint, thereby guaranteeing the right of access to higher education to all citizens who hold high school certificates or the equivalent.

Just before the establishment of the two Open Public Universities, the government also passed a landmark Private College Act in 1969 under which the private sector was authorised to operate higher education institutions with the right to confer degrees. By, 1984 a certain number of private colleges that had consolidated their positions as fully fledged tertiary institutions were raised to the university status.
Another landmark in the history of Thailand's higher education was the establishment of the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA) in 1972. Prior to the aforementioned date, all universities were the responsibility of the Office of the Prime Minister, and colleges were under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

Ever since the establishment of the Ministry of University Affairs in 1972 another bill was passed by the parliament, namely, Private Higher Education Act of 1979 as amended in 1992, and higher education institutions spread far and wide throughout the country capable of catering to the needs of all people.


With the promulgation of the Private College Act of 1969 and almost immediately thereafter, a few private colleges were established and licensed to confer degrees under the decision of the Ministry of Education. By 1975, all private higher education institutions came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA). The Private Higher Education Act of 1979 empowers MUA to oversee all matters relating to

- Conditions for the establishment and operation of private institutions;

- Directives for management policies for private institutions and regulations thereof;

- Approval of academic standards and the enforcement of MUA's Quality Assurance Principles;

- MUA's development policies of private higher education institutions.

Establishment and Operation: Article 9 of the Private Higher Education Act of 1979 as amended in 1992, stipulates that any person or juristic person has the right to establish an institution of higher education such as a university or institute or college subject to compliance with relevant ministerial regulations.

To be a university the requirement is that:

- the institution concerned must offer education in selected academic disciplines and other branches of professional knowledge;

- must offer education leading to the conferment of diplomas, associate degrees and degrees at various levels;

- the institution concerned must fulfil the four missions of teaching, research, community service and the preservation and promotion of national heritage and culture.
To be an institute the requirement is that:

- the institution concerned must offer education in academic disciplines or professional knowledge with special emphasis on certain disciplines or group of disciplines;

- must offer education leading to conferment of diplomas, associate degrees and degrees at various levels;

- the institute must be committed to teaching, research and producing graduates. It may render community service or be engaged in preserving and promoting national heritage and culture.

To be a college, the requirement is that:

- the institution concerned must offer academic and professional disciplines in some areas;

- it must award diplomas, associate degrees, and degrees not higher than the masters' level;

- it must commit itself to teaching, research and producing graduates and it may engage itself in community service or promoting national heritage and culture.

To effectively implement the provisions in the Private Higher Education Act of 1979 as amended in 1992, a ministerial committee entitled 'Private Higher Education Council was created to regulate certain fundamentals concerning operation of private institutions. The Council has the following functions:

- To recommend to the Minister of University Affairs to grant permit to a person or a juristic person who has met all requirements to establish a higher education institution;

- To recommend to the Minister to give approval of the academic standards of each degree programme and finally to grant recognition of the degree conferred by the institution concerned;

- To recommend to the Minister to approve curriculum proposed by an institution.

In other words, all matters pertaining to essential characteristics of a higher education institution need to be approved by the Minister of University Affairs based on the recommendation by the Private Higher Education Council. Accordingly no private higher education institution has any right to act independently without prior approval from the Ministry of University Affairs.
Management Structure

Under the MUA's regulations, the highest authority of a private higher education institution resides in the university council, which acts as a governing board of the institution. The Ministry of University Affairs designates its own representatives to be members of the university council in proper proportion to the members proposed by the private institution according to the provision in Article 28. The university council has the duty to oversee the administration of the institution and to give approval in all matters such as concluding agreement for academic cooperation with other universities both within the country and abroad, academic standards, curriculum, academic policies, establishment of new department or new school, financial affairs, etc. before submitting these matters to the Ministry of University Affairs for final approval. Besides the Private Higher Education Council, there are 34 other committees of various types to oversee and to recommend to the Council for approval especially academic activities of a private institution.

Academic Standards and the Quality Assurance Practices

By Article 25 of the Private Higher Education Act of 1979, the Private Higher Education Council has to approve academic standards of an institution whenever the latter is ready. Accordingly, academic standards are set for each degree programme and it takes into account various institutional characteristics, for example, quality of curriculum content, number of qualified teachers in proportion to students in the programme, library materials, equipment and other facilities, etc. These characteristics must conform to a set standard for each degree programme.

Furthermore, all question papers must have the approval of a committee of external examiners before setting them as official exam papers for students. Grading and marking standards must also have the approval of the said external examiners.

Recognition of degree or institutional accreditation is granted for each degree programme. For this an Evaluation Team or an Assessment Team set up by the MUA comes and evaluates the performance of a faculty, or a department for approval of a particular degree. An interview with faculty members and students in the programme form an indispensable part of the evaluation and approval process.

Credit Transfer and Mutual Recognition

Mutual recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific is an urgent matter for the region because higher education institutions the world over are facing many new challenges. For example, the internationalisation of higher education is becoming a reality today, owing to the rapid process of globalisation, interdependency among countries and bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation among many states. Furthermore, academic and student mobility in Asia and the Pacific Region has not yet become fully practicable and operational among higher education institutions. This is due, in some ways, to the complexity of mutual recognition of higher education qualifications in the region. It is noteworthy, that the ERAMUS-SOCRATES Programme has been going on very well in Europe and it has worked satisfactorily and smoothly there as intended. With UNESCO's initiative, it is hoped that a similar programme will soon become a reality in Asia and the Pacific thereby strengthening academic and research development in the region.
However, a number of overarching issues emerge - academic standards and academic excellence among higher education institutions as equal partners in mutual recognition. In this context, Dr. Jane Knight of the Ryerson Polytechnic University, on behalf of the Canadian Bureau for International Education has voiced her concern by saying: '...to achieve international standards is a key rationale for internationalisation. According to the government and private sectors, an important role for the government is to ensure that the quality and standards of the Canadian education system meet international standards.' In this same line of thinking, David W. Strangway, Canadian Prime Minister, in his speech in 1996 at Guadalajara Conference in Mexico mentioning academic excellence as an indispensable part of internationalization said, 'Universities in general have an overriding commitment to excellence. It is the excellence of our faculty, of our students, of our programmes that is the key underpinning of our activities. In today's larger interconnected and yet smaller local world, it is clear that without internationalisation, we can no longer maintain excellence.'

Concerned with academic excellence, the participants of the Asia and Pacific Regional Conference on National Strategies and Regional Cooperation for the 21st Century, assembled in Tokyo, declared that 'In countries where privatisation is accepted, governments should provide a legal framework to regulate institutions, to develop appropriate accreditation and monitoring mechanisms, and to ensure academic freedom and maximum autonomy. The complementary and supportive role of private universities and colleges must be recognised.'

In this context, the Thai Government through the Ministry of University Affairs has been cited as exemplary in the region, in passing through its Parliament a landmark bill, 'The Private Higher Education Act of 1979' providing monitoring mechanisms for excellence in private higher education, and promoting private higher education in the country thereby contributing to solutions on equity and accessibility in higher education.

**Points for consideration**

Being aware of the fact that academic cooperation especially in research and student mobility will not be feasible if the institutions concerned do not meet academic standards of excellence, the following suggestions are hereby tendered:

1. **International syllabi or the equivalent:** To facilitate 'Credit Transfer', higher education institutions should adopt an international system of course content and formatting, for example, one credit hour involves a minimum of 15 hours of classwork. Therefore, a subject involving three credit hours will require at least 45 hours in class. To qualify for sitting at the final exam of any subject, a student is required to have a minimum of 80 per cent class attendance.

2. **Teacher Education:** The programme for teacher education is normally four years after high schooling in many countries. It is worthwhile to consider whether this time frame should be extended to five years to include a) four years of academic studies and b) a year of internship to provide practical training and experience including inculcation and absorption of professional ethics. The nature of the teaching profession is 'a high standard of service for its own sake.' It requires on the part of a teacher candidate a commitment to uphold and put to practice moral principles and personal integrity.
It is also felt that teachers in faculties or schools, other than the faculty of education, such as engineering or biotechnology should also be exposed to some courses in pedagogy and professional ethics to ward off criticism against lack of training in these important subjects. It is a well known saying that the best teaching is done at the primary school and the worst takes place at college level!

3. Basic schooling as entry requirement to tertiary level: UNESCO should continue to urge Member States of the region to systematise and internationalise their education institutions by adopting international standards of primary -and secondary schooling known as the K-12 system which is accepted in many Western countries as a prerequisite to entry requirement to tertiary level. The different systems and standards, for example K- 10 system, which are applied and which prevail in many countries have been a stumbling block to mutually recognising one another's diplomas and degrees.

4. Information Technology: To enhance academic excellence especially through research and development among higher education institutions, efforts should be made, through UNESCO's initiative, to establish regional centre for inter-electronic and digital libraries. There is also a vast reservoir of information, literature and educational materials waiting to be tapped from the millions of websites on the Internet and countries that choose to shut out this channel of valuable resources will be big losers in terms of providing knowledge and technology to their citizens. The Internet is the medium for keeping abreast of the times, which will enable us to maintain similar standards and levels of education prevailing in other regions of the globe: The need for use of the Internet and other technological innovations must therefore be emphasised and promoted.

5. Peace Education and education in professional ethics: There is now general acceptance of the need for education in human rights as part of a curriculum in general education on subjects including ethical and moral orientation in all Fields of education- arts, science, technology, law, medicine etc. Seeing that the very future of humanity, and the survival of our planet is at stake we must incorporate lessons on ethics and morality at every level of instruction and the curricula of all institutions must be suitably revised to comply with this requirement.

6. Since UNESCO has advocated the concept of lifelong learning we must make changes in the existing system of education. Institutions in the West have already launched programmes for junior and senior business executives to return to campuses to attend reorientation courses and other programmes of instruction to reinvigorate, redirect, and diversity their training, attitudes, outlooks, visions and projections. All higher education institutions must prepare themselves to cater to this kind of adult education and the arrangements must cover all conceivable types of jobs and employment.

7. Quality Assurance: All higher education institutions should accept and implement the principles of quality assurance and accreditation in order to guarantee uniformity of academic standards. This will require adoption of education reform measures in member countries based, *inter alia*, on the following framework of principles. The sooner these principles are applied, the better to accelerate the internationalisation of higher education institutions.
• Provide high quality and effective teaching and learning, integrate curricula with appropriate teaching and learning process, appoint qualified instructors, ensure appropriate preparation and participation by students and enforce other factors which will enhance the teaching and learning process.

• Develop and adjust course syllabi to meet academic and professional standards. All courses must be evaluated on a regular basis, administered efficiently and revised according to requirements.

• Adopt criteria for recruiting, developing and maintaining qualified instructors with the appropriate background, experience and ethical standards. Job descriptions for instructors must be clearly specified. Instructors must be evaluated regularly by way of improving the quality of teaching and maintaining high educational standards.

• Provide high quality teaching and education including appropriate lesson plans, teaching preparation, detailed course modules, teaching aides, course evaluation, instructor evaluation and educational assessment.

• Organise systematic and standardised evaluation procedures for assessing student's achievement.

• Promote the learning process by ensuring that buildings provide facilities appropriate to teaching in large or small groups or for independent study. There must be libraries with text materials and other types of books and periodicals. There must be computers and software to enable students to acquire knowledge from diverse sources. There must be pleasant and suitable environment to enhance student performance, creativity and enthusiasm for their education.

• Engage in activities which develop students' physical, mental and emotional health, provide activities that promote self-discipline, democracy, environmental preservation, ethics, responsibility and commitment to family and community.

Concluding Remarks

As all private higher education institutions in Thailand are under the jurisdiction and control of the Ministry of University Affairs as explained above, we can say with assurance that they have met a certain standard of excellence. For this reason, credit transfer and mutual recognition is acceptable not only among themselves but very well recognised by universities in the U.S as well as in Europe.

References


Quality Assurance in Indian Higher Education:
Lessons Learnt on Benchmarking

By

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In India, promoting quality in education has been the focus of almost all the committees constituted at different stages of the development of its higher education system. Among the various national consultations, discussions, and recommendations that gave a direction and focus to its developmental strategies after independence, the National Policies on Education (NPE) have played a major role. It was the National Policy on Education (1986) that made an explicit mention of the need for the quality assurance mechanism. In view of the directives of NPE, the University Grants Commission of India established the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), as an autonomous body in 1994, in Bangalore. The objective of NAAC as envisaged in the Memorandum of Association is to assess and accredit institutions of higher learning - universities and colleges or one or more of their units, in India.

During the six years of its functioning, NAAC has evolved the model of assessment and accreditation that suits the Indian context, operationalised it in around 150 assessment visits, and has overcome many bottlenecks. It has progressed from the stage of 'Apprehension' to 'Appreciation' by the academia. The various developmental stages that NAAC has been through can be broadly classified into three phases: Phase-I is characterised by mistrust, rejection, apprehension and hesitation from many quarters and NAAC's efforts to build broad consensus; Phase-II is of operationalising the assessment model and fine-tuning the methodology; and Phase-III is characterised by appreciation, greater expectations, large volume of assessment and new challenges.

In the first phase of three years, the institutions were either indifferent or reluctant mainly due to their reservations about the implications of lower rating, relevance in the affiliating structure, suitability of the model to Indian soil and the checks that already exist like the various review mechanisms of UGC and University. To clear these apprehensions, seminars and academic interactions were organised with various groups of academia at the national level to familiarise them with the concept of assessment and accreditation. Through a series of consultative interactions with a large body of academia the norms, methods and instruments for quality assessment were evolved. These strategies helped NAAC to cross the stage of trying to convince the system of higher education about the merits of External Quality Assessment (EQA) which ushered in the next phase of operationalising the process.

During the next two years of operationalising the strategy, 118 institutions of higher education – 10 universities and 108 colleges, were assessed by NAAC. As the reports and grades of these institutions were made public, questions of a different order came up. While the acceptability of NAAC itself was at stake in Phase-I, the problems of Phase-II were mostly on fine-tuning the process and outcome. However, institutions realised the benefits of EQA,
accepted NAAC’s methodology, appreciated the outcome of assessment and started to implement the recommendations noted in the assessment report.

The shift in the response from 'apprehension' to 'acceptance' was further strengthened as the stakeholders took note of NAAC's process. Some of the stakeholders gave a clear indication that they would base their decisions on the outcome of assessment by NAAC. This made more institutions volunteer for assessment and accreditation resulting in Phase-III – the current phase of large volume of assessment. In the current phase, the responsibilities of NAAC have become more challenging. It has to concentrate on large volume of assessment without compromising on the rigour and objectivity of the process. The questions of collaborative assessment, mutual recognition, format of reporting the outcome, linking it with non-linear funding and the like have come into focus.

Though each phase of development is characterised by a unique set of features, one of the issues that has been consistently in focus in all the three phases is 'benchmarks'. What are the benchmarks and indicators NAAC has evolved for placing the institutions under various categories? As we know, the outcome of assessment by NAAC places an accredited institution under one of the five categories – A* (A one star) to A***** (A five star) - with A* at the bottom and A***** at the top category, depending on the quality of education. If it had been a two-point scale – Accredited, Not Accredited – the question on benchmarking might not have gained so much momentum. The five point grading sensitised academia to the rationale behind the classification. By the time this question became prominent in Phase-III, NAAC had done adequate field trials and pilot studies on Benchmarking. For a vast system with around 11000 institutions of higher education that cater to the needs of seven million students with 0.35 million teachers, assessment experience with around 150 institutions is just one per cent of the total number of institutions. But in terms of the efforts that have gone in for 14 years in evolving an acceptable methodology of EQA for such a complex system and the field experience, NAAC could get enough data to reflect on. Let us see our experience with benchmarking through which we learnt many valuable lessons.

**Benchmarking for Quality Assessment**

The first effort was to understand the concept of benchmarking in the context of quality assessment from the point of view of academia. It started with in-house efforts to do the ground work, which extended to consultation with experts and at a later stage the discussions involved a small focus group of experts from UK and India. In the initial stage the group tried to see how benchmarks are used in industry and how we can draw a parallel for higher education. The focus group could draw from the experience of the other countries also. It was agreed that Benchmarking for Quality Assurance can be achieved in the following five stages:

- Setting the platform;
- Choosing the appropriate benchmarking activity;
- Identifying the aspects to be benchmarked;
- Fixing the norms and indicators;
- Applying the benchmarks.
**a) Setting the Platform**

In industry, benchmarking is an ongoing systematic means of measuring and comparing the work processes and outcomes of an organization. For an appropriate platform to base benchmarks with reference to NAAC's objective – performance evaluation of institutions for self-improvement – two issues gain significance. One is 'performance evaluation of the institution' as a whole as it stands today and the other is the focus on 'self-improvement'. The scene for such a frame of reference can be set, by posing the following questions:

- Is there a gap between the actual and expected performance of the institution?
- Are there any practices that will improve its performance?
- Is the institution performing better than it ever has?
- Are there other organisations that are performing better and from whom the institution being assessed can learn?
- The benchmarks for institutional assessment should provide an insight into these questions.

**b) Choosing the Appropriate Benchmarking Approach**

Benchmarking activity as practised by industry, has been classified in many ways by experts. One way of classifying is internal, functional, competitive, and generic benchmarking. In another classification, Watson (1993) has outlined the development of Process Benchmarking in USA. He argues that when companies realised it was easier to learn from organisations with whom they were not in competition, that led to the development of this approach. There is yet another classification where Best Practices Benchmarking is advocated for self-improvement.

In the early days of benchmarking, the emphasis was primarily on measurement per se, and on relatively straightforward comparisons. This was followed by a gradual shift in attention towards processes which had a key influence on overall performance. Today, the main focus of benchmarking activity is on best practices, information which is obtained by active collaboration with best-in-class companies having comparable processes, wherever and in whichever industry they may be practised.

Various definitions exist on what constitutes best practices benchmarking. A group of leading US high technology corporations sees it as 'the best-in-class achievement which becomes a recognized standard of excellence against which similar things are compared.' A leading UK exponent defines it as ‘…a structured process for learning from the practice of others, internally and externally, who are leaders in a field or with whom legitimate comparison can be made'. In spite of the variance in perspectives, the following common elements of best practices benchmarking are found to be appropriate for NAAC's objectives:

- Development of an understanding of the fundamentals that lead to success;
- Focus on continuous improvement efforts;
- Management of the overall change process to close the gap between the existing practice of the institution and that of the best-in-class institutions with reference to the most relevant key performance variables.
To be applied effectively, best practices benchmarking may be seen as an ongoing systematic means for determining the best practices of the best-in-class institutions, and using the information as a basis for goals, strategies and implementation to improve performance. More simply, best practices benchmarking for quality enhancement would be 'finding and implementing best practices that would lead to significant improvement in the quality of educational provisions'.

c) Identifying the Aspects to Benchmark

Taking the parallel from the industry, the key issue to this attempt on identifying the aspects to benchmark is process mapping. Process mapping may be defined as the effort to highlight process ownership (which department does what) and the distinction between value added and value lost activity. Process mapping helps to identify problem areas, ownership of process and measurement points. Benchmarking through process mapping helps to identify where practice has deviated from policy.

Establishing benchmarks through process mapping is not a new concept in higher education. It has already been tried by the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU). In 1996 Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service (CHEMS), a sub system of ACU launched an international 'University Management Benchmarking Club'. This Club focuses on the effectiveness of university-wide processes and goes beyond the comparison of data-based scores and conventional performance indicators and looks at the processes by which results are achieved. By using a consistent approach and identifying processes which are generic and relevant, irrespective of the organisation and how it is structured, it becomes possible to benchmark across sectoral boundaries.

In CHEMS methodology, the first stage of the benchmarking process is the identification of aspects and processes to be addressed. Members of the benchmarking club are then required to supply a written submission, backed up, if necessary, by supporting material from the university's existing documentation, highlighting anything perceived to be a strength or weakness on their part. As regards the assessment process, the assessors award scores with respect to the strength of responses. The reports detailing acknowledged strengths and areas for improvement are provided to each member, together with a composite model of good practice. These are then discussed to arrive at some consensus as to what might be regarded as best practice. It is this process that, the club believes, encapsulates true benchmarking i.e., in the absence of predetermined benchmarks, the aim is to establish benchmarks through the process.

NAAC attempted a similar methodology. In its assessment of quality of education, NAAC's methodology looks into how the various policies and processes of the institution are geared to maintain quality in its educational provisions. The focus is the functioning of the institution as well as the outcome. To facilitate the mapping of processes that lead to sustenance and enhancement of quality, NAAC had identified ten parameters, which would encompass every aspect of functioning of the institutions of higher education: goals and objectives; curriculum design and review; teaching-learning and evaluation; research and publications; consultancy and extension activities; organisation and management; infrastructure facilities; support services; student feedback and counselling and generation and management of financial resources.
For each parameter, best practices that contribute to the efficient and effective functioning of the institution towards quality offerings were identified and defined and they were called criterion statements. Instead of identifying the practices of the 'best-in-class' institution, the experts who worked on the criterion statements/best practices statements focused on an ideal institution. Under ideal conditions, the best practices that can be expected in an ideal institution were identified as criterion statements. These criterion statements served as best practices benchmarks. The criterion statements/benchmarks thus evolved are given as Annexure and for the parameter on Curriculum Design and Review they are as follows:

- The programmes of teaching and learning are consistent with the goals and objectives of the institution;
- The process of programme approval is well organised;
- Feedback from academic peers and employers is used in the initiation, review and redesign of programmes.

The first ten institutions that underwent assessment and accreditation were assessed using these criterion statements/benchmarks as the referral points. In the revised methodology, the ten parameters have been re-organised into seven criteria, without losing any of the aspects of functioning. Hence the benchmark statements remained basically the same though they had to be re-organised under the revised seven criteria – curricular aspects; teaching-learning and evaluation; research; consultancy and extension; infrastructure and learning resources; student support and progression; organisation and management and healthy practices. Further, for each one of the criteria, key aspects of functioning have been identified. For example, the key aspects identified for the criterion on curricular aspects are given below:

- Compatibility of the programmes with goals and objectives;
- Initiation, review and redesign of programmes;
- Feedback on programmes;
- Interaction with academic peers and employers;
- Programme options.

d) Setting the norms and indicators

In practice, the self-study report of the institution provides information on existing policies, practices and achievements of the institution with reference to criterion statements/benchmarks. From the data collected from the self-study report, the peer team takes judgement on the performance of the institution in totality by rating the existing practices of the institution. However, such assessments rely heavily on peer assessment and there has been mounting pressure on making the peer assessment as objective as possible by focusing on 'process measurement'.

Process measurement is the development of meaningful high level or core indicators to measure the value added or lost to the identified processes. The processes identified from the best-in-class become the base to set those high level indicators. NAAC followed a two fold strategy towards process measurement which made peer assessment as objective as possible. One approach was towards evolving detailed guidelines, protocols and safeguards for making value judgement. The other was towards careful development of indicators and norms which resulted in the credit point system as pointers of quality.
The development of the pointers of quality was based on our thinking that the existing situation in reasonably good and representative institutions may be taken as an indicator of mid level achievement and any institution that exceeds that level deserves to be credited. For every key aspect of the seven criteria, if we find out the existing situation in most of the good institutions, by pitching it a little higher it would be possible to fix a higher level of classification, and pitching it a little lower will give another category. Such an attempt has already been done in the Indian context.

The study 'Assessment and Accreditation of Universities – A study of two central universities' was conducted by the Association of Indian Universities in 1996. It empirically tested some of the indicators of performance on two central universities – Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI). The study tested indicators under four categories – Mission oriented indicators related to teaching-learning, indicators for assessment of teaching performance, indicators for assessment of research performance and indicators for assessment of financial performance of universities. Based on the values obtained for the two universities the index of performance was developed. For example, under the aspect 'indicators for assessment of research performance', one of the indicators tested was research funding per teacher. The Index of performance suggested the following grading:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per teacher availability of Research funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rs.2 lakhs (approximately 4000 US $)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs.1 lakhs (approximately 2000 US $)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rs. 50,000 (approximately 1000 US $)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than Rs.50,000 (less than 1000 US $)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In another study by the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPLA), based on the data collected from around 100 universities, four areas were identified to assess the performance of universities – dynamism, social concern, achieving excellence and efficiency. Under each area both qualitative and quantitative aspects were identified and for the quantitative aspects indicators were evolved. UGC has also taken steps to compile the data of all the universities to develop such indicators.

In a similar effort to develop indicators for the key aspects of NAAC's assessment, data was collected from a representative sample of around 40 good institutions and averages were calculated for the quantitative aspects. For some aspects it was possible to fix a three level classification and in other places a two-point scale was fixed. The pointers of quality developed for Criterion-I of an affiliated college’ is given below:
### Table 1
**Pointers of Quality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Criterion I: Curricular Aspects</strong></th>
<th><strong>Credit points</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is the range of programme options available to the students for awards such as degrees, certificates/diploma?</td>
<td>For every 3 programmes 1 point not exceeding 5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To what extent are the programme options career oriented?</td>
<td>If &gt;10% of the programme options 1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do students have the flexibility to pursue a programme with reference to a) Time frame matching student convenience and horizontal mobility b) Elective options / Non-core options</td>
<td>Peer judgement – if satisfactory 1 point for each aspect, not exceeding 2 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How are mission and goals of the college, if any (other than the general transmission and generation of knowledge), reflected through the curricula?</td>
<td>Peer judgement – if good 2 points Satisfactory 1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Is there any mechanism to obtain feedback from academic peers and employers on the teaching programmes and how is the feedback used in the initiation, review and redesigning of teaching programmes?</td>
<td>Peer judgement – if good 2 points Satisfactory 1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How long does it take for the college to introduce a new programme within the present university system?</td>
<td>If &lt;2 years 1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Has the college introduced any new courses in spite of delay in university processes, if any?</td>
<td>Peer Judgement – if satisfactory 1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Give details of college-industry-neighborhood networking, if any.</td>
<td>Peer Judgement – if satisfactory 1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Furnish details on the inter/multidisciplinary aspects of curriculum design.</td>
<td>Peer Judgement - if satisfactory 1 point</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Affiliated colleges function under the governance of a university. The university legislates on courses of study and holds examinations centrally on common syllabi.*
e) Applying the benchmarks

After a thorough discussion with a group of experts, the pointers of quality was piloted on a few institutions. It became clear that for initial focus on aspects of importance, the credits were useful as the referral point. However, the credits are not to be added-up to arrive at the credit score. In the light of the standing of the institution with respect to these pointers, the peers had to give an overall 'criterion score' and as such they were not meant to be converted into criterion-wise scores. The format of the Frame of Reference for peer assessment for criterion-I is given below:

Table 2
Frame of Reference for Peer Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The frame of reference</th>
<th>Evaluation(score in %)</th>
<th>Justification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;55</td>
<td>55-59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Criterion I: Curricular Aspects**
This aspect requires value judgement on the practices of the institution in initiating and redesigning courses that are relevant to the regional and national needs. It also focuses on how the curriculum design of the institution offers diversity and flexibility to learners. This can be best done by judging where the institution stands with reference to the following aspects:
- Compatibility of programmes with goals and objectives
- Initiation, review and redesign of programmes
- Feedback on programmes and interaction with academic peers and employers
- Programme options

The recent mid-term review conducted by NAAC revealed that the frame of reference has greatly improved the objectivity of the peer assessment. The lessons we have learnt in the course of these developmental stages are many and most of them are due to the response from the system, feedback from assessors, feedback from asessees, in-house analysis, feedback from international counterparts, and the recent mid-term review involving all the beneficiaries of NAAC's process.
Lessons Learnt

From the experience of the other countries, we have already realised that benchmarking cannot be the answer to all the problems. The benchmark approach is valuable for providing information to be used in the prioritization and decision-making processes of the institution and the assessment team. However, benchmarking is not the answer to all assessment-related issues. Assessment is a complex issue - much more than merely applying benchmarks to arrive at simple and straightforward solutions.

We were also aware that benchmarking can be used only for issues of high value. Benchmarking can help to clarify the issues, but is an extravagant way of confirming that 'below average performance is still below average'. Many issues can be resolved simply by giving them attention. Benchmarking is meant for those issues where the importance of the issue is high and the direct bearing of the issue on quality is established, but the point of reference is not clear.

The other important conclusion we could draw from other country experience was that benchmarking should be built on existing data as much as possible. Higher education has all along used benchmarks. But, it has traditionally been awash in data on aspects like finance, staffing, academics and students. Generally, it has been used to justify budgets or obtain more funding. Obviously, little has been used to improve the quality of higher education. The traditional data such as annual endowment growth, educational and general operating expenditures per student, research income generated, class size, student/faculty ratio, library holdings, student success rate and rate of employment of students do not address the issue of quality assessment directly and explicitly but they are useful indicators to evolve benchmarks. Benchmarking should use these existing data. With these three major conceptual clarifications we acquired from other country experiences, we learnt a lot more at the practical level in the Indian context.

In the initial stage, there were occasions when the first few non-representative experiences could have influenced the discussions on benchmarking. That was the time when a few assessment exercises were completed and the field experience had made everyone aware of some of the problems specific to the Indian system. For instance, the question whether quantitative indicators were feasible for an assessment of a key aspect where field experience and contextualisation matter a lot, had always led to many arguments. However, during such discussions NAAC was cautious not to impose its ideas on the working group to avoid any counter productive effect. It allowed the consensus to evolve from the group and that strengthened the feeling of ownership of the process. If adequate care had not been taken to restrain NAAC from leaning too much on its initial experiences, it could have intimidated the group process and consequently the outcome could have been biased.

Having taken care of the likelihood of initial biases, NAAC agreed on rigorous in-house efforts coupled with wider national consultations. In spite of quality assessment being a new culture to our context, we soon realised that there was enough expertise and wisdom outside NAAC. But we agreed that the in-depth ground work should be done by NAAC, to be enhanced by the appropriate combination of focus group workshops and national level seminars. While the focus groups led to micro level discussions, the national level consultations broadened the horizon of thinking. Bringing in people from various background
and interests including employers, parents and industry also helped us to enhance the insights of the group process.

While evolving the norms and indicators, the work already done by AIU, NIEPA and UGC - the apex bodies of Indian higher education was taken into consideration. By updating and expending those statistics, we could work on our approach and further fine-tuning was done through pilot studies. Our assumption that at the initial stage, mistakes are bound to happen and pilot studies, field trials and experimentation may help in eliminating the adverse effects, was reasonably correct. Our experience revealed that the pilot studies helped us a lot in fine-tuning the crude statistics into 'sensitive indicators'.

Further, we found that our policy of transparency in all our efforts paid rich dividends. We never hesitated to tell our institutions the possible delineation in NAAC's approach. We made it acceptable to our institutions that benchmarking for quality assessment should be seen in the light of the objectives for which NAAC has been established. Instead of trying to be defensive we were clear from the beginning to tell our institutions that we are in the process of evolving an appropriate model that will serve our prime objectives in the initial stages and may be expanded to include more beneficiaries and secondary objectives at a later stage. The transparency and clarity in our approaches instilled confidence among the academia.

While working towards the support of the academia, we were aware that it is not possible to expect 100% acceptance for all our efforts. Whatever be the strategy followed, there may always be a minority group to criticize it. The reason need not be based on ignorance or lack of conceptual clarity or sceptism but may be due to genuine concern. Keeping this in mind, we followed a multi-prong approach for information dissemination on benchmarking. The assurance that was given to the stakeholders about the appropriateness of benchmarking, enhanced the acceptance of our efforts.

Capitalising on the early adopters was a great support to our benchmarking efforts. The broad involvement of early adopters enabled us to ensure widespread support in evolving the benchmarks. It was also helpful in pilot studies and collection of data for working out the norms and indicators.

During pilot studies we realised that benchmarks cannot be followed blindly. They may provide an external point of reference or standards for evaluating the quality of the processes of the institution under assessment. But they cannot be interpreted in a void. Contextualising, synthesising and sensitising the benchmarks to objectives are essential, for which peer assessment is inevitable. In fact the frame of reference is an outcome of what we have learnt in our pilot studies. While applying the pointers of quality we found that for criterion-wise judgment the outcomes on individual indicators had to be synthesized by the peers. For example, the student-library book ratio may be very favourable in an institution. It may have long working hours, open access system and book bank facility. If the team goes by those aspects alone, for library facilities, the institution may come under the top bracket. But a closer scrutiny may reveal that over the years the institution has accumulated books but the quality of the books, currency, implementation of the book bank facility, support services of the library, linkage with other libraries, and maintenance need a lot of improvement. As one can see, for some of these aspects quantification in terms of a ratio is possible and for the others it has to be a qualitative judgement in terms of good or satisfactory or poor. The peers have to synthesize both qualitative and quantitative inferences to arrive at a holistic value
judgement, in the context of the institution. In other words, the peers have an important role in analysing and moderating the credits, synthesizing the outcome on individual indicators to arrive at criterion scores and evaluating the contextual framework of the pointers. Accepting peer assessment as a vital component, the frame of reference was developed to focus the peer attention on key issues that have a direct bearing on criterion assessment.

In a nutshell, the lessons learnt may be summarised as follows:

- Benchmarking need not rely heavily on quantitative indicators;
- Quantitative indicators may be used as guides to take value judgement on benchmarking;
- For quality assessment best practices benchmarking offers an appropriate strategy.

The following stages contribute to successful benchmarking for quality assessment:

- Setting the platform with reference to objectives;
- Choosing the appropriate benchmarking activity;
- Identifying key issues to be benchmarked;
- Setting the norms and indicators;
- Applying the benchmarks sensibly.

The following may be borne in mind in the benchmarking effort:

- Benchmarking cannot be the answer to all assessment-related problems;
- It has to be used for issues of high value only;
- Benchmarking should be built on existing data as much as possible;
- To eliminate the initial biases pilot study and field trials are necessary;
- The feeling of the ownership of the process has to be developed among the institutions;
- Combination of focussed core group workshops and broad national level consultations will ensure the appropriateness of the strategy;
- Transparency in all the efforts will enhance the acceptability of the strategy;
- Multi-prong approach is essential to ensure the support of academia;
- Peer assessment is vital in contextualising the benchmarks;
- Clarity in frame of reference is important to guide peer assessment.

**Future Perspective**

When we look at the industrial experience and the unique characteristics of the Indian system of higher education, it becomes evident that the efforts taken by NAAC to evolve benchmarks and pointers of quality have been reasonably on the right line. The workshop on Benchmarking and Performance Indicators in Higher Education for Quality Assessment – the first of the series of discussions – indicated that the foundation on which NAAC's process has been built is appropriate. The seven criteria of assessment as broad areas of functioning of an institution, the key aspects of functioning, criterion statements as benchmarks, the pointers of quality as indicators, the grading pattern and the frame of reference for integrating the value judgement of peers on indicators have been accepted to be workable and adequate. It has also been suggested that parallel efforts may be taken to work on subject benchmarks. In the next few months NAAC will be focusing on this and when the universities come forward for assessment for the next cycle of assessment, these benchmarks will find a wider application.
References


John R.N. Bullivant (Ed.) *Benchmarking for Continuous Improvement in the Public Sector*, Longman publications, UK, 1994


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Annexure

Parameter I: Institutional Goals and Objectives
• The goals and objectives of the institution are clearly stated, periodically reviewed, and communicated systematically to all its constituencies.
• The goals and objectives of the institution reflect contemporary educational needs and are relevant to regional/national/international demands.

Parameter II: Curriculum Design and Review
• The programmes of teaching and learning are consistent with the goals and objectives of the institution.
• The process of programme approval is well organised.
• Feedback from academic peers and employers is used in the initiation, review and redesign of programmes.

Parameter III: Teaching, Learning and Evaluation
• Programmes of teaching and learning take account of individual differences among learners and offer academic flexibility.
• The institution facilitates the effective running of the teaching-learning programmes.
• The evaluation procedures in the educational programmes are rigorous and fair.
• Regularity and confidentiality of examinations are maintained.
• The institution has an efficient mechanism to recruit qualified and adequate faculty.
• The institution has an open and participative mechanism for evaluation of teaching, research and work satisfaction of the faculty.
• The faculty have opportunity for continued academic progress and professional advancement.

Parameter IV: Research and Publications
• The institution promotes research culture among faculty and students.
• The institution has a vigorous and well scrutinised publication programme and actively encourages faculty and students to publish in academic forum.

Parameter V: Consultancy and Extension Activities
• The institution promotes faculty participation in consultancy services.
• The institution is responsive to community needs and conducts relevant extension and awareness programmes.

Parameter VI: Organisation and Management
• The organisation of the institution is such that powers and responsibilities are clearly assigned to designated bodies and individuals to facilitate tasks related to every aspect of the goals of the institution and every segment of its constituencies.
• The offices and departments of the institution are governed on the principles of participation and transparency.
• Academic and administrative planning in the institution move hand in hand.
• The institution has a realistic academic calendar which is followed meticulously.
• The institution has a realistic and transparent admission policy which is adhered to.
• The organisation has an adequate and fair mechanism for creation and appointment of administrative staff and for their continued professional advancement.
• Management techniques and technologies, to the extent possible, are used by the institution for efficient running of every administrative and academic decision-making.

**Parameter VII: Infrastructure Facilities**
• The institution has adequate physical facilities to run the educational programmes and administrative functions efficiently.
• The growth of the infrastructure keeps pace with the academic growth of the institution.
• The institution has effective mechanisms for maintenance and optimal use of infrastructure.

**Parameter VIII: Support Services**
• The institution has sufficient and well run support services to ensure the physical and intellectual health of all its constituencies.
• The institution has adequate library and computer facilities with easy access to all its constituencies.
• The institution practises relevant welfare schemes for all its constituencies.

**Parameter IX: Student Feedback and Counselling**
• The institution has an effective mechanism to use student feedback for the quality enhancement.
• The prospectus of the institution gives clear guidance to students about admission and completion requirements for all programmes, the fee structure and refund policies, financial aid and student support services.
• Financial aid to students is fairly distributed.
• The institution offers competent academic counselling and placement services to its students.

**Parameter X: Generation and Management of Financial Resources**
• The finances of the institution are judiciously allocated and effectively utilised to make its programmes and functioning cost-effective.
• The institution has imaginative and effective resource mobilisation and management strategies.
• Budgeting and auditing procedures are regular and standardised.
Mechanisms for Quality Assurance

by

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Introduction

Quality assurance is important to institutions of higher education as it relates to an institution’s operational effectiveness in teaching, research and service. This in turn may affect the recognition of its academic standard, the worth of its graduates, and funding from public and private sources. The experience of the National University of Singapore is outlined in this paper by way of summaries of some of the mechanisms for quality assurance that have been in place for many years and that have in no small part contributed to the university’s international reputation today. The schemes and procedures are explained in the context of teaching and learning, research, staff administration and communication. The lessons learned are that when an institution is serious in purpose, has transparency, fairness and consistency in the deployment of quality assurance mechanisms, its achievements will not fail to be recognized.

Quality in institutions of higher learning is a subject that is gaining increasing importance for several reasons. First is the transition and transformation of economic systems throughout the world from resource and skilled-based competitiveness to that of knowledge and talents. It is largely only a matter of degree that differentiates the nature of economies. Development of manpower, in terms of objectives and methodologies therefore has to take on a different nature in this light. Secondly, the development and availability of fast means of communication means geographic boundaries are no longer barriers to transmission of knowledge and ideas; indeed failure to take advantage of the new technology would mean a faster rate of lagging behind the mainstream. Finally, the creation and application of knowledge can no longer be confined to single disciplines; cross-fertilization of ideas and synergistic achievements can take place only where there is a conscious dismantling of the boundaries between the disciplines and building of connections and exchanges among the various traditional academic fields - assuming that they still exist along traditional divides.

The new global requirements and paradigms would tend to generate fresh perspectives and initiatives with regard to quality assurance in institutions of higher education. However this is not to say that traditional and existing mechanisms for quality assurance are to be discarded; in fact many time-tested procedures would still be useful, particularly when aligned with modern-day expectations of higher education. In this presentation, the experience at the National University of Singapore (NUS) will be highlighted, with outlines of mechanisms that have been instrumental to the building up of the reputation which the university enjoys today in the international academic community. I will make use of the time available to describe quality assurance mechanisms in four major functional areas of the NUS. These are:
- Teaching and learning experience;
- Research;
- Staff management;
- Communication.

**External Examiners**

To maintain high standards and international recognition of its academic degrees, an external examiner system is used at NUS. Senior and academics from reputable overseas universities are appointed for two-year terms. Aside from scrutinizing examination papers, the external examiner also reviews marked scripts and comments on the general results, such as the objectivity and consistency of standards.

The external examiner visits the department at least once per term. This provides the opportunity for him to sit in project presentations and oral examinations. He would also offer his advice on matters related to teaching, curriculum development, research and other academic matters. Very often meetings are arranged for him to talk to students and alumni for feedback and opinions from different perspectives.

Theses at Masters and Doctorate levels are also subjected to examination by external examiners. In the case of PhD theses, the oral defense is called only after reports from two external examiners and an internal examiner have been received. The nomination of each external examiner must be justified on firm academic grounds.

**Boards of Examiners**

As the direct outcome of an education institution is qualifications awarded to students, it is important to establish a creditable award mechanism that is fair and consistent. Internally, related disciplines such as different branches of engineering should also have equitable procedures in awarding common degrees. Such requirements are met via the functions of the boards of examiners.

Boards of Examiners, typically constituted from a mix of senior and junior academics, function at both department and faculty levels. They moderate examination scores, recommend prizes and other awards, and determine the different classes of Honours to be assigned. Unusual cases are deliberated upon and decisions documented. This would ensure that procedures and decisions are consistent over time, and each academic qualification held by graduates has been carefully calibrated with known standards.

**Assessment by professional bodies**

As a supplier of high-level professional manpower, the university seeks the involvement of appropriate professional institutions for consultation and feedback, as well as the formal recognition to its educational programmes.

In NUS, faculties offering professional degrees regularly have their programmes assessed externally by the relevant international professional institutions. This practice provides another level of assurance that academic standards are current and acceptable worldwide.
For example, the Engineering Faculty’s Bachelor of Engineering programmes are accredited by institutions of Chemical, Civil, Structural, Electrical, and Mechanical Engineers in the United Kingdom; the School of Design and Environment has its degree courses accredited by The Royal Institute of British Architects, The Commonwealth Association of Surveying and Land Economy, The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveys and The Chartered Institute of Building, UK. In the Medical Faculty, the General Medical Council (GMC), UK, regularly reviews the teaching and assessment of medical students for accreditation; the Dentistry Faculty has its programmes assessed for accreditation by the General Dental Council, UK. At the School of Computing, its curriculum is regularly updated in accordance with the recommendations of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) in the USA.

**Feedback**

Various avenues are in place to assist the university improve its design, development and delivery of educational processes: constant update and refinement is critical to the relevance and updating of academic programmes in fast-changing environments.

Some mechanisms of feedback at NUS are:

- Student feedback on the quality of teaching which has been a practice for more than a decade now;
- Peer review;
- Video Recording of lectures;
- Employers and alumni feedback; and
- Department consultative committees

Both undergraduate and graduate students participate in end-of-course surveys to provide critiques on subject coverage and the teaching of faculty members. The information obtained is used to drive teaching effectiveness and quality of course contents. The exercise is now carried out on-line, followed by detailed computer data analysis.

Peer reviews provide staff with the benefit of constructive view on teaching styles and techniques from experienced colleagues sitting in during lectures and tutorials.

Faculty members are encouraged to have their lectures video-taped for self-assessment and improvement. They have the sole discretion on the disposal of the recorded material.

Employers and alumni provide another source of input to the educational process. Their views and suggestions are regularly solicited through a myriad of surveys.

Department Consultative Committees comprise the department management team and representatives from government agencies, private organizations and individuals whose experience and knowledge are related to the department’s activities. These committees meet regularly to assure that the curriculum is kept abreast of developments outside academia and expectations of employers and society on our graduates.
Research

Apart from teaching excellence, the other pillar of a premier institution must be its research activities. The research output of NUS has earned the University a Class One ranking under the Carnegie Classification System. This is due in no small part to the university’s mechanisms for quality assurance for research, some of which are described below.

International Academic Advisory Panel

An International Advisory Panel is established at every faculty to advise on education and research matters. Each panel comprises renowned academics from overseas universities and prominent industrialists where appropriate. The panel is invited to provide strategic perspectives into the educational processes as well as research directions. Visits are arranged on an average of once every two years.

Aside from the formal aspects of the functions of a visiting panel, the close personal interactions among panel members and NUS faculty members often prove to be stimulating, providing impetus for new thinking in curriculum development and research efforts. The networking effect with top international academics and industry leaders often lasts much longer than the appointed terms of panel members. There is now a visible increase in student and staff exchanges and short-term attachments for research collaboration between NUS and top-tier universities in the world.

Evaluation of research proposals

As research resources are limited, it is important that their distribution be administered with prudence. Calls for research proposals are issued regularly and, depending on the amount of financial support applied for, each research proposal is scrutinized by committees at various levels, coordinated by the university’s Office of Research and Graduate Studies.

In project proposal reviews, intellectual and innovative merits are assessed, as well as the potential impact value of the proposed work. Resource-intensive proposals are evaluated by panels of senior academics drawn from various disciplines; this is an important feature of the project assessment process which facilitates the recognition of the merits of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary endeavours. Depending on the decision arrived at, the source of funding of a project can be either from the university’s own research budget, or co-funding and contributions from government agencies or industrial organizations. A project proposal requesting for high funding level is subjected to external and independent reviews as well.

Evaluation of on-going projects

For continuing funding, researchers must submit regular progress reports on their projects. Management committees critique these reports and a decision is reached to determine if a given project continues to be viable. Key indicators of good research output include the number of patents filed, research papers published in refereed journals of good standing, and the impact of research findings to either an academic field or industry. A project with a demonstrated poor performance may have its funding cut back or, in the extreme, terminated.
Evaluation of research publications

Standards for quality of research publications are determined and set at the faculty and sometimes department level. A system is in place where a list of high quality and well-recognized international and regional refereed journals in named fields of research is compiled. The list is reviewed and updated periodically, with views sought from experts where necessary. The list is available to faculty members who are encouraged to submit research findings for publication in the better journals. In a field such as Computer Science where research findings are often rapidly reported in conferences, a ranking of specialized conferences is also made in accordance with their reputations.

Ranking of journals or conferences is admittedly difficult and the results often controversial; nevertheless the exercise forces some serious review and analysis, and provide general recommendations for the dissemination of research findings for the greatest impact. This in turn constitutes a means to assist younger faculty members in their career development.

Staff Management

Quality assurance in an institution of higher learning should, in a way, start with the staff members. Some measures taken in this respect will be described here; reference is made only to faculty members although schemes are in place for non-academic or administrative support personnel as well.

Recruitment of Faculty Members

Recruitment of faculty members is carried out with the utmost rigour. Candidates are identified through advertisements and recommendations and, in the case of senior appointments, search committees. As NUS draws academics world-wide, the search is without any bias with respect to nationality, religion or race.

Faculty candidates are judged via references and interviews, and potential appointees are invited for personal visits to the university, expenses paid, from wherever they are in the world. It is important that they be present at the department for some mutual understanding and assessment, and have a first-hand feel of the cultural and living environment in Singapore. At this stage of development of NUS, only the individuals with a creditable academic or track record and demonstrable potential will be seriously considered.

Annual Assessments

The annual assessment of faculty members is an integral element of a system to ensure a high quality of teaching, research and administration. It is used as a means to determine if a faculty member is suitable for salary adjustment or, in some cases, promotion through the academic rank.

At every review exercise, each faculty member is required to complete a set of documents highlighting his contributions in various aspects of university functions. His performance is assessed by his department head, dean of faculty, and peer review committees where appropriate. Counseling where appropriate is part of the review process. Tenure and promotion to full professorship requires more detailed and stringent assessment processes.
As a rule external inputs are solicited; internationally accepted norms for such rewards are used with little compromise. The days are gone when individuals may look for tenure or promotion on account of age or length of employment with the university; indeed non-performers can nowadays be encouraged to seek alternative careers elsewhere.

**Communication**

With more than 5,000 staff and 30,000 students spread around 150 hectares, effective communication is vital to the operation of the university. The long term objective of NUS is the availability of state-of-the-art multimedia technologies for both internal and external communication, realizing the vision of a borderless, global intellectual community.

Every staff member of the university today works with a PC, while all students have easy access to one wherever they may be on campus. Every major hub where students gather is also equipped with access points so that anyone with his own portable computers may carry out study or research activities outside the classroom.

With every staff member and student allocated a user-id, internet and e-mail access is pervasive and used extensively for rapid communication.

Aside from work-related communication, some other uses of the e-mail system include the Vice Chancellors monthly message to all staff, invitations to seminars, talks, concerts and other functions, and public broadcast of announcements and advisories. Functions such as student registration, teaching feedback, examination results announcements are all carried out on-line. The system network is constantly upgraded with the latest software and hardware; indeed NUS is the only institution of higher learning listed by *Computerworld* (a US publication) in its ranking of the world’s 25 most network-savvy organizations.

**Concluding Remarks**

A brief summary has been made of the various quality assurance mechanisms in place at NUS. Many of the systems and procedures are not new or unique at this university. An important requirement for their successful operation is that they should be communicated to and understood by all concerned. Quality in teaching, research and service cannot be ordained; it has to be cultivated through conscious and continual efforts of assurance, assessment and audit.

While one should be mindful of the yearn for academic freedom and administrative flexibility on the part of the faculty members and students in a typical institution of higher education, it is also important to ensure that public or even private funds for such institutions be judiciously utilized for results in line with the mission of the institution. This is where quality assurance mechanisms must be drawn up and deployed in a serious manner. Indeed the trend in higher education nowadays is to reward performance as reflected by quality indicators, rather than provide funding according to simple counts of programmes and students. Variations of quality assurance schemes are certainly possible or even desirable to suit the different stages of development of different institutions; as long as there is seriousness of purpose, transparency, fairness and consistency, quality will certainly be assured and sustained.
UMAP and UCTS: A Challenge to Relinquish the Quality Differentials of Universities in Asia and the Pacific

By

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Introduction

Asia and the Pacific has as yet attained no level of political integration comparable to that of the Europe, where ERASMUS/SOCRATES has been active for years. The indigenous cultures and modernisation processes are so much diverse from one country to another. In the Asia-Pacific context, therefore, it is real challenge to relinquish the boundary of each institution that has widely differential quality of university education.

The UMAP (University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific) was founded in 1991 in Canberra to take up this challenge with its objective to achieve a better understanding across Asia and the Pacific by increasing mobility of students and staff and to improve the quality of higher education in the region. To accomplish this aim, UMAP developed a scheme for credit transfer called UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme (UCTS), and envisages developing current bilateral arrangement into a region-wide multilateral, consortium-type student exchange scheme.

The UCTS is essentially the scale of credit earned at the host university, to be generally applicable for the purpose of converting into home-university grades. It thus amounts to ‘common regional currency’ of credits in the region. It consists of UCTS Credit Points, a general yardstick for the quantitative property of university courses; and the norm-based UCTS grading scale, a qualitative measure of the academic achievement of exchange students. Nevertheless, criteria and practice for grading being so much different from one country to another, some may question if all the grades expressed in the UCTS Grading Scale should be treated equally. A kind of ‘discount rates’ might emerge, functioning eventually as an objective and quantitative yardstick measuring the qualities of the various institutions across Asia-Pacific. The competition among universities in the region would then ensue to raise the value of ‘discount rates’. The UCTS Grading Scale can have such disciplinary effect on universities, which will be driven by the operation of ‘invisible hands’ to improve their qualities. If the competition hit some equilibrium at a higher level, the agenda of quality assurance and achievement of the real multilateral exchanges would become more realistic, and we will be many steps closer to real relinquishment of the institutional and national boundaries.
Relinquishing Institutional and National Boundaries

The systems of higher education as well as nation states in our contemporary world are still fragmented into many separate entities, which to the eyes of many have increasingly come in contradiction with the globalising contemporary society and economy. Ironically enough, having the cold-war structure of world politics collapsed, the locality of the world becomes more conspicuous and the nation states and macro economies seem to have become more consolidated into the units of competition. Fresh region-wide geopolitical and neo-liberalist competition among the institutional entities, which circumscribed themselves with boundaries, have become the norm in the Asia-Pacific.

The institutions of higher education are no exception. An institutional system valid in an entity becomes invalid once one crosses the boundary. The ethnic and linguistic diversities have been much wider in the Asia-Pacific; partly due to wider expanse of the geographical area that has accommodated much more variegated indigenous cultures, language and heritage, differential processes of colonisation by various powers that have moulded variegated local educational systems after their conceptions at home and more diverse levels of economic development attained. Unlike Europe, one still requires a visa, to cross many of the political boundaries in the Asia Pacific, which are sometimes hard to obtain. Conversely, immigration at a disembarkation point is too harsh. Within these boundaries, each academic or university community has largely remained a self-perpetuating institution parochially reproducing themselves and the local value system with respect to the definitions of university quality. Ironically, the process of globalisation has uncovered the parochial uniqueness of each institution in many cases. The attempts to relate the locally unique systems with each other or to gear their own university system globally often ends up with little fruition and much hardship. In fear of this struggle and competition, one might be tempted to confine himself/herself within the boundary so that he/she can live and act comfortably in the taken-for-granted world of existing institutions.

To battle with this backward way of thinking and catalysed with the spatial compression of global economy, efforts have been made in academic communities to bring this fragmented mosaic of universities to terms with globalism in various ways.

Where countries or nation states share a common heritage and thus have more homogeneous entities in a region, an attempt of regional integration tends to be more successful. It is natural, therefore, the most successful of student exchange programme is found in Western Europe, thanks to the relative homogeneity of European society and legacies across the region. There, the initiative of the European Union and the ERASMUS/SOCRATES made the universities of the region attain the level of integration within which students can move freely with few worries about quality differentials.

The Asia-Pacific is much different from Western Europe. As John Reilly of the University of Kent pointed out in his paper ‘European Inter-University Co-operation and Student Mobility - The SOCRATES-ERASMUS Experience’ presented at Fifth UMAP Reference Group Meeting held in Auckland in 1996, Asia and the Pacific has had no level of political integration comparable to the European Union which offers plentiful financial assistance for student exchanges.
In the Asia-Pacific context, therefore, it is a real challenge to relinquish the institutional boundary within which widely differential qualities in university education are contained and to integrate universities in different countries and territories in the Asia-Pacific region.

**UMAP – Its Emergence and Objectives**

This diversity comes in parallel to the fact that Asia and the Pacific is one of the fastest growing regions in the world. The economic growth has brought about economic integration and consequently given rise to a kind of communal sense among the countries and territories of the region, which has been calling for new approaches to a wider range of issues.

Education is naturally of no exception. The community of higher education has been realising the need of a much intensified and expanded action space of the students and faculties that can cover entire expanse of the Asia-Pacific.

The challenge started in September 1991 in Canberra, when the UMAP (University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific) was founded. The general objective of UMAP is, ‘to achieve, by extended and enhanced co-operation between higher education institutions, a better understanding within the countries and territories of the Asia/Pacific region of the cultural, economic and social systems of the region by increasing mobility of higher education students and staff and improving the quality of higher education in the region’. The UMAP is not another social club of the university authorities who occasionally meet for ceremonies, but the organisation that really endeavours to contribute to the general welfare of the university community in Asia and the Pacific.

In the Canberra meeting and subsequent general meetings (called ‘Reference Group Meeting’), the UMAP has set for itself the following agenda (italics mine):

- to increase significantly the number of active bilateral agreements among higher education institutions, and consortiums of institutions and others, in the Asia-Pacific and by such means to foster internationalisation of curricula and teaching through exchanges of students and staff;
- to expand a programme of student exchanges based on agreements, with the period of student residence in another country or territory being of a duration sufficient to allow an appropriate language/acculturation course in addition to a regular undergraduate semester course load;
- to identify and overcome progressively the impediments to higher education student mobility by agreements between individual institutions and organisations, reinforced by supportive government action where necessary;
- to foster bilateral institution and business enterprise relationships in countries and territories of the region on co-operative education and/or work placement models, including allowing students to take a period of work experience in an enterprise in a country or territory within the region as part of an accredited course;
- to contribute towards that broad thrust of contemporary higher education, internationalisation and to bring an Asia-Pacific perspective to those fundamental questions of university education in more universities in the region; and
• to establish, over an appropriate time scale, a small, cost-effective organisational structure comprising identified co-ordinating organisations in each country or territory, a representative group to guide UMAP policies and practices, and a minimum-sized secretariat located in a suitably central city.

The UMAP Reference Group met for the second time in Seoul, Korea in April 1992, where the above objectives of UMAP were discussed and agreed. The Third Reference Group met in Taipei in April 1993, and agreed the statement Framework for Trial UMAP Programmes to monitor progress with UMAP projects and determined future actions. In preparation for each of the Reference Group, meetings, a Working Party met to carry out various tasks it has been given, and played a continuing monitoring role until the next meeting of the Reference Group.

Challenges that Await UMAP

The Fourth Reference Group Meeting identified principal impediments that had hindered the university mobility in the Asia-Pacific region as ‘difficulty in obtaining appropriate financial assistance, differing academic years, language barriers and credit transfer and recognition of degrees’. Action was called for to rectify the geographically imbalanced reciprocity, i.e. a surplus in the case of the numbers of Japanese students sent to most of the countries in North America and Europe and deficit in respect of most of countries and territories in East and South East Asia and Oceania. The Declaration of the same meeting also pointed out that ‘inadequate language training both at home and host institutions; the frequent inadequacy of credit transfer; some difficulties with student and staff visas and shortages of accommodation at reasonable cost’. The Declaration urged governments and institutions of the countries and territories of the region to take action as soon as possible.

Given the diversity of the university education in the Asia-Pacific, resolving the issue of transfer of credit from the host to home institutions was the challenge in itself. The difficulty arose partly due to the difference in qualities and structures of university education in various countries and territories in the region, and partly to the lack of a model scheme for credit transfers. To facilitate further short-term student exchanges in the region, it was imperative to develop a guideline or a scheme for granting credit and a model contract to protect the student interest in credit transfer arrangements, which could overcome the variegated quality of university education in the region.

The language barrier is another major challenge to be resolved in the region, as the mediums of instruction being used in universities in the Asia-Pacific Region are linguistically less interrelated to each other than those of their European counterparts. This requires students of more steady and longer-term efforts to acquire the language skill necessary to comprehend the lectures given as well as to participate in discussion sessions at the host institution. UMAP has been concerned about this, as manifested in the Declaration of the Fourth UMAP Reference Group Meeting, suggesting governments of the region assist in offering language courses or training, and higher education institutions to provide flexible pre-semester language training for exchange students.

Whether the exchange students are to be instructed in the lingua franca of the region, which is English, or in the local language of the host university, has been a topic of a heated debate at the fourth UMAP Reference Group Meeting at Osaka, Japan. One would legitimately claim that real understanding of the contents of lectures and active participation in the discussion in
class, which are essential in a university study, could be facilitated more easily by adopting the *lingua franca*. Another could also legitimately claim that, as the acquisition of language skills is a matter of course in the cross-cultural experience or even constitute the very rationale itself to study in the host country, the study using English as a medium of instruction may as well be done at home. It is a crucial topic of research for UMAP to conduct research and discussion in this respect. The solution might lie in another challenging task of developing more efficient language teaching methods that make the prospective and incoming exchange students acquire sufficient language skills possible in a short period of time.

To arrange an opportunity for internship in a private company in a host country, as stipulated in the UMAP objectives of 1991 mentioned above, is still another challenge that UMAP faces. The above Declaration encouraged business enterprises to allow students to acquire work experience and to make a part of their own dormitories available to exchange students.

Other potential challenges for the UMAP expressed in the past UMAP meetings included: to facilitate the granting of visas for student and staff exchanges; and to provide additional financial assistance towards accommodation; to encourage local communities to facilitate interactions with students by providing opportunities for home stay, participation in local cultural events and other appropriate measures.

**From Bilateral to Multilateral Exchanges**

In order to bring the student exchange in the Asia-Pacific region into a level comparable to that of ERASMUS/SOCRATES, a longer-term challenge awaits UMAP to develop a region-wide multilateral, consortium-type student exchange scheme.

Under a bilateral scheme, a student of University A can only study at University B abroad, with which A signed an exchange agreement. Whereas in a multilateral scheme, a student in home country A is free to study on short-term at ANY universities in the host country, based on an umbrella agreement between host and home countries. This arrangement could further be extended into the region-wide multilateral exchange taking the entire Asia-Pacific as a single space for student mobility. A student can go to any universities in the region according to his/her preference: once this goal materialises, universities in the Asia-Pacific region really turns into the University of Asia-Pacific, with its campuses scattered about all over the countries and territories of the region.

The *UMAP Strategic Plan*, drafted on the initiative of the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors’ Committee (NZVCC) based on the discussions made at the UMAP Working Party meeting held at Lincoln University, New Zealand in August 1995, and adopted by the Reference Group Meeting in August 1996 (*see Appendix*), placed research emphasis on investigating, publicising and reporting the possibilities of multilateral exchange schemes in general and to facilitate and develop models of universal multilateral exchange schemes within the region.

We may start initially by promoting bilateral exchanges. The immediate next step would then be to conclude ‘county-to-county’ working umbrella agreements, Japan with New Zealand, for example, or a type of exchange to be carried out under a detailed Memorandum of Understanding developed between Australia and Thailand. To facilitate exchange of the second type, UMAP could function as a clearinghouse role, using the Internet as a means to proliferate students of the region with detailed and up-to-date information and advice.
As the region-wide exchanges progress, UMAP might as well start functioning as the coordinator for the prospective consortium of the multilateral exchanges. It can even develop joint curricula promoting sense of togetherness as citizens of the Asia-Pacific as a whole, which could commonly be taken by the exchange students in the region. Asia and the Pacific will thus gradually come to be covered with a web of multilateral exchanges.

**Universal Currency of Credit Across Universities**

The deeper UMAP gets involved in the multilateralism, however, the more serious is student suffering from the parochial university system which becomes invalid once one crosses the institutional boundaries.

A presentation made at the Fifth UMAP Reference Group pointed out ‘limited credit transfer within UMAP as a major barrier to student mobility in the region’ and agreed that UMAP should work towards a system of credit transfer, taking the ECTS as a possible model. In the following Working Party meeting held in Thailand in November 1997, Australia proposed a project to develop a ‘pilot credit transfer scheme for UMAP’, and the UCTS Steering Committee was formed with Japan, Australia and Thailand as the principal members, to draft the scheme.

The draft scheme was formally tabled and approved in the Reference Group meeting held in Thailand in August 1998. It was named after its European counterpart the UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme (UCTS). The UCTS started in September 1999 on a trial basis. University participation in the trial is voluntary, although some principal UMAP member countries have been trying to place UCTS into a more formal institutionalised framework. In Thailand, for example, the cabinet adopted UCTS as the official scheme to convert credit internationally. The UCTS documentations have been translated into Japanese and the Japanese government (Mombusho) is promoting the adoption of UCTS for transferring credits earned by students under its scholarship programme.

The main objective of UCTS is to increase student mobility by, firstly, ensuring exchange students credits for study undertaken at the host university, and secondly, to make the processes of credit transfer fairer, more transparent and easier to administer both to students and university administration by creating ‘common regional currency’ of credits.

The nature of the UCTS could be compared with the role of the US dollar in the world economy. The US dollar is the ‘key currency’ to which all other economies compare their local currencies. The relative values of local currencies can be determined by means of relating it to the value of US$: 107 Japanese Yen = US$ 1 or HK$7.8 = US$1; therefore HK$1 = 107/7.8 Japanese Yen = 13.72 Japanese Yen, for example. In this system, people need to care only about the exchange rate of their own currency to US$, as the rate to other currencies will be arrived at subsequently based on this conversion using US$ as the general yardstick. The UCTS has two main conceptions, ‘UCTS credit points’ and ‘UCTS grading scale’, both of which can readily be understood in this light.

The **UCTS Credit Points** is a means to make variegated time-values attached to the notion of ‘credit’ by different universities in Asia and the Pacific. As all of us aware, the numerical value representing a full-time student’s workload is very much different from country to country, or even from university to university in a specific country. A numerical value, with
60 credit points representing a full-time student’s workload for a full academic year, is therefore given to the unit of a course to measure student workload required to complete that course. Suppose that a full-time student’s workload for one semester (= half a year) in university A is 72 and that in university B is 16. As the UCTS Credit Points for one semester is 30 (60 divided by number of semesters per year, which is 2), the conversion rates are: 1 UCTS Credit Point = 72/30 ( = 2.4 ) University A credit point, or 1 University A credit point = 30/72 ( = 0.4167) UCTS Credit Point; and 16/32 ( =0.5 ) University B credit point = 1 UCTS credit point or 1 University B credit point = 32/16 (= 2) UCTS Credit Point.

The virtue of the UCTS Credit Points lies in that once the ‘exchange rate’ of a university’s own credit point to UCTS Credit Point is fixed, there is no need for the home institution to worry about details of the duration of the academic year, number of classes per week, length of classes at a time etc. of the host institution. All of these details translate into numerical figure of UCTS Credit Points – just as a moneychanger at the Bangkok International Airport need not worry about quality of Burmese Kyat once a traveller from Burma (Myanmar) has changed within Burma his/her money into US$ and offered that US$ for exchange into Thai Baht in Thailand. The UCTS Credit Points thus function as general yardstick for the quantitative property of university courses.

**The UCTS Grading Scale – Its Unofficial Role for the Quality Assurance of Higher Education**

The UCTS grading scale is, on the other hand, the achievement measure of the exchange students, based on five passing and two failing grades, developed for use as a scale to be converted into home-university grades. It is essentially a ‘norm-referenced grading scale’ where a pre-determined percentage (or range of percentages) of candidates in each cohort receives one of seven of the following grades: (Here, the quality of students’ achievement and the institutional system of the host university that helped the students to achieve that quality is in question).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UCTS Grade</th>
<th>Successful Students Normally Achieving Grade (%)</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>EXCELLENT: outstanding with only minor errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>VERY GOOD: above average standard but with some errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>GOOD: generally sound work with a number of notable errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>SATISFACTORY: fair but with significant shortcomings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>SUFFICIENT: performance meets the minimum criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FX</td>
<td></td>
<td>FAIL: some more work required before credit can be awarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>FAIL: considerable further work is required</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Complication arises from the fact that comparison between grades is not as easy and simple as that of ‘credit points’, since what is involved is the way of expressing the quality of student performance, rather than that of quantity.
The *UCTS Users' Guide* expressly admits an aspect of this complication in that whereas the UCTS is norm-based,

[S]ome institutions participating in UMAP will have criterion-referenced assessment schemes. These are schemes with specific knowledge/skills required for a pass. The schemes award a pass (or better) to all of those candidates demonstrating this knowledge/skill. At least in theory, up to 100 per cent of candidates may be awarded a pass under the criterion-referenced form of assessment.

Still, a home institution of an exchange student may believe that the teaching level at a host institution may be of lower quality than that at home, thus credit of the host institution should not transfer to home.

What lies behind these complications are the localities that are legacies that have been deeply embedded in the university institution in each country and territory in the region as explained earlier in this paper. Universities in some countries adopt norm-based criteria, while others criterion-referenced. Some universities take a stricter attitude to students in grading, whereas others do it more leniently.

Overwhelmed by the complications involved in accommodating these local varieties in quality and grading in university instruction, the idea of granting unspecified credit by home institution for the host institution courses had been proposed at the Fifth Reference Group Meeting. Some universities in the region, such as those in Australia and Japanese universities have already begun to adopt this credit concept.

The UCTS grading scale tries to tackle the complication in another, perhaps more straightforward and challenging way – introduction of the ‘universal currency’ for quality of university instructions.

In the UCTS Grading Scale, a grade of the courses earned at a host institution is converted after the ‘norm-based’ scale shown in the Table above, which tells the relative position of the particular exchange students among the entire cohort of the host-university students. All it takes for the home university is to translate the UCTS Grading Scale, or the representation of the relative position that the student earned at the host university, into that of its own – at least officially.

Yet, doubt can immediately arise in the minds of the registrar or faculty of the home institution having evolved into the UCTS. Should we treat all the grades expressed as the UCTS Grading Scale as equal? Is the UCTS Grading Scale based on the study at the host university that is ranked first in *Asiaweek* of identical value in real terms to those from the other host university ranked 100th? Not many university registrars might agree with the wisdom that the grade offered by both universities should be treated equally.

Many might then be tempted to multiply the grades expressed in the UCTS Grading Scale obtained from various universities by some ‘discount rates’ either more or less than 1, depending on the qualities of the universities. In fact, if the UCTS is ever to become the norm or ‘universal currency’ adopted ubiquitously in the region, the variable of university quality, which is different among universities, must somehow be incorporated into it. In other words, this application of ‘discount rates’ on the grades in UCTS Grading Scale is likely to become a
de facto condition for universal acceptance of the UCTS Grading Scale across the board by the universities in the region.

Here, the situation could become similar to the relation of the local currencies to the US dollar. Just as the foreign exchange rate of the local currencies to the US$ reflects the relative performance of each macro economy, with respect to the trade and fiscal balances, interest rate, economic growth, the ‘discount rates’ thus attached to the values of the UCTS Grading Scale can become an objective and quantitative yardstick measuring the qualities of the various institutions across Asia-Pacific.

Here I need hasten to add that this is not the official wisdom or intention of UMAP or UCTS, either expressed or implied. This might be an unintended (or even illegitimate) side product of the UCTS Grading Scale. Yet, we should remember that no US Treasury has ever admitted that its national currency should have the official function of the yardstick measuring the qualities of macro-economies across the world.

The consequence that follows would then be the competition among universities in the region to raise the ‘discount rates’ attached to the values of the UCTS Grading Scale, as the figures of the ‘discount rates’ amounts to the outcome of the processes of virtual mutual external assessments of each other in the UMAP region; therefore they express the quality of university in a readily comprehensible numerical term. The UCTS Grading Scale can have such disciplinary effect on universities in Asia-Pacific, which will then be driven by the operation of ‘invisible hands’ to improve their qualities.

Once the competition may hit some equilibrium at a certain higher quality level, the agenda to achieve the real multilateral exchanges would become more realistic, and we will be many steps closer to real relinquishment of the institutional and national boundaries and the ‘University of Asia and the Pacific’. The UCTS Grading Scale can potentially have such a far-flung ramification as to the quality assurance of higher education institutions in the region through this process.

**Concluding Remarks – The Information Technologies and UMAP**

Governments, universities or their peak bodies of the principle countries/territories of Asia and the Pacific have been taking their active parts in promoting the international student and faculty mobility scheme. Although the progress always depends much on initiatives taken at grass-root level by individual institutions or their groups, UMAP can provide leadership, advice and assistance, to promote student exchanges, which will eventually contribute to the assurance of quality of the institutions of higher education.

UMAP is not synonymous with UCTS, UCTS being the obvious fruit of the 1996 Strategic Plan. In the spirit of the Declaration of the Fifth UMAP Reference Group Meeting that fosters ‘internationalism of both curricula and teaching’, Korea, the Chair of the UMAP for the term 1998 – 2000 advocated the need of UMAP to place heavier emphasis on the information technologies (IT). Korea proposed the concept of ‘UMAP Cyber University’ in the Reference Group meeting in Seoul in 1999, and put together an informal study group with Korea, Thailand and Japan as members, to investigate various possible ways in introducing the IT into the UMAP framework and student exchanges. Needless to say, proliferation of
information by means of the IT would naturally function as a major catalyst for the region-wide quality assurance of the institution of higher education in the 21st century.

It is the hope and expectation of UMAP that the leaders of tomorrow in the Asia-Pacific, while still young, experience as many localities in the region as possible. In this age of ours entering the 21st century, UMAP must foster these young future leaders and academics who are bold enough to study the reality of struggle, competition and issues prevalent in the region, and to think of possible ways of solving the problems through transcending the parochial boundaries into global and regional space. By this means they become capable of appreciating the universal and general notion of Asia and the Pacific as well as globally, either by moving physically across the regional space, using UCTS as the universal currency of credit, or virtually in the cyberspace, using various IT medias created in the future under UMAP sponsorship. UMAP is indeed there to help accomplish their endeavour through its multi-faceted agenda and activities.
Appendix : The UMAP Strategic Plan

Vision
Asia-Pacific is the most dynamic region in the modern global economy. It is also an area in which there is a growing sense of community. Its continuing rapid growth in trade, migration and tourism needs to be supported by a much more sophisticated and widely dispersed understanding of the countries and cultures of the region. At another level again, the development of international relationships and multinational institutions, and the increasing interdependence of economies, call for new approaches to a wide range of issues. One way of achieving this objective is through the mobility of university students and staff. UMAP will encourage an increasing proportion of the leaders of tomorrow to become familiar with other countries in the region, and the foundation will be laid for a generation of leaders capable of appreciating the multilateral nature of many problems and bold enough to pose multilateral solutions.

Accompanying aims of UMAP are to contribute towards that broad thrust of contemporary higher education, internationalisation, and to bring an Asia-Pacific perspective to those fundamental questions of university education everywhere; and, through an effective credit transfer scheme, help facilitate recognition of qualifications in the Asia-Pacific region.

Goals

• To promote increased mobility of university students and staff in the Asia-Pacific region;
• To assist participating countries and institutions of UMAP resolve current issues relating to bilateral exchange;
• To provide a vehicle for moving beyond bilateral arrangements to multilateral arrangements;
• To provide a vehicle for governments and regional organisations interested in supporting the UMAP vision.

Objectives

• To increase significantly the number of active bilateral agreements among higher education institutions and consortia of institutions and others in the Asia-Pacific region and by such means to foster internationalisation of curricula and teaching through exchange of students and staff;

• To expand student exchanges based on bilateral and consortium agreements, with the period of student residence in another country or territory being of a duration sufficient to allow an appropriate language/acculturation course in addition to a regular undergraduate semester course load;

• To identify and overcome progressively the impediments to higher education student mobility by agreements between individual institutions and organisations, reinforced by supportive government action where necessary;

• To foster bilateral institution and business enterprise relationships in countries and territories of the region on co-operative education and/or work placement models,
including allowing students to take a period of work experience in an enterprise in a country or territory within the region as part of an accredited course; and

- To establish over time a small cost-effective organisational structure comprising identified co-ordinating organisations in each country or territory, a representative group to guide UMAP policies and practices and a minimum-sized secretariat located in a suitably central city.

**Strategies**

**Promotion**

The UMAP vision needs to be promoted to students, staff, governments, regional organisations, business, other potential allies. This can be achieved by:

- the publication of a brochure which is widely available to interested individuals and organisations utilising Working Party and Reference Group meetings as ways of publicising and promoting UMAP to a wider audience;
- encouraging national contact bodies and institutions involved in UMAP to publicise the benefits of international exchange and to include participation in UMAP in their strategic plans for the internationalisation of education;
- advocacy to governments, regional organisations and business of the benefits of supporting UMAP;
- consolidating the relationship between APEC and UMAP.

**Research**

Investigate, publicise and report on multilateral exchange schemes in general to facilitate and develop UMAP as a multilateral exchange scheme.

**Reporting**

Participating UMAP countries and territories should report biennially on:

2. current exchange schemes that contribute to the broad purposes of UMAP;
3. the numbers and type of students and staff involved in UMAP exchanges;
4. the application of credit transfers.

**Establishment of an International Secretariat**

The International Secretariat was initially established on a two year pilot basis in Japan. The Secretariat would:

- act as a clearinghouse on multilateral mobility matters;
- work with the UMAP Reference Group and Working Party and UCTS steering committee to develop and monitor the UCTS;
- assist the UMAP Reference Group to:
  - promote the expansion of UMAP throughout the Asia Pacific,
• strengthen the strategic focus of UMAP, and
• establish a permanent funding base for UMAP;
• provide administrative support to the UMAP Reference Group and Working Party; and
• liaise with other organisations.

The International Secretariat will report to and be guided by the UMAP Reference Group and the UMAP Working Party.
The Educational Reform

Sometime in the early 90's, the Malaysian education system experienced major reforms involving all levels of education i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary. In the tertiary sector, the reforms took place both in the public as well as the private higher education sectors. The purpose of the reforms were to increase the number of students having access to higher education and to improve the quality of higher education provided by these sectors. Several Acts of Parliament were enacted to cater for the changes in the education system involving both the quality as well as the massification of higher education provided in the country.

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

To improve the quality of governance and management in the public universities, the existing University and University Colleges Act was amended to allow for significant quality changes in these institutions. Likewise, in the private higher education sector, attempts were made to improve both the quantity and quality of higher education provided. The Private Higher Educational Institutions Act (PHEI) of 1996 was enacted to allow for the establishment of private universities as well as to streamline the registration and up-keep of such institutions.

In addition, the Lembaga Akreditasi Negara Act of 1996 was also enacted to specifically focus on ensuring the quality of courses of study provided by the PHEIs. LAN or the National Accreditation Board of Malaysia was formed under this Act. It is headed by a Chairman who is also the Chief Executive and is assisted by about 70 other officers and staff. A Board comprising ten prominent professors and representatives of the industry and professional bodies was also created to assist in the formulation of policies pertaining to the quality of higher education provided by the PHEIs. Under section 4(1) of the LAN Act, 1996, the functions of LAN are:

1. to formulate policies on the standard and quality control of courses of study and certificates, diplomas and degrees;

2. to set, monitor, review and oversee the standard and quality of courses of study; and
   - accreditation of certificates, diplomas and degrees;
3. to determine the level of achievement of the National Language and the compulsory subjects specified in the Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996 as prerequisites to the award of certificates, diplomas and degrees; and

4. to advise and make recommendations to the Minister for his approval of courses of study to be conducted by private higher educational institutions with regard to: the suitability of arrangements relating to the educational facilities relevant to the courses of study; and the standard and quality assurance of the courses of study or training programme.

The Process

LAN was established to formulate policies and control the quality and standard of courses of study provided by PHEIs. It is not an easy task given the variety of academic programmes and PHEIs involved. Besides the 'quality' culture in education is a recent innovation. Prior to this, all that the PHEIs had to do was merely to seek approval to set up, register the institution, have premises and teachers to conduct an academic programme. There was no set criteria and standards on the quality of education provided.

LAN's procedures and processes are based on the PHEI Act and LAN Act of 1996. Essentially, there are three major processes. Firstly, all courses of study by PHEIs require an initial approval from the Minister of Education. Once approval is granted and the courses of study are conducted i.e, after six months for a Diploma and one year for a Degree, it is then subjected to an assessment to determine the achievement of minimum standard. The assessments for approval of courses and the achievement of the minimum standards which are mandatory under the law are undertaken by LAN. The third process is achieving the level of accreditation. This is not compulsory since it is a much higher level of assessment. Nevertheless, to encourage PHEIs to apply for accreditation, there are values added to it. For example, a graduate who has undergone an accredited course of study could be considered for work in the public sector. The assessment of courses of study for approval, achieving the minimum standards and accreditation are conducted by a panel of assessors trained by LAN.

Benchmarking

In our context, 'benchmarking' can be said to be a positive process, that provides objective measurements for base-lining (setting the initial values), goal-setting and monitoring of the criteria and standards set for private higher education. When LAN was initially established, the PHEIs were already operating for some years offering various types of courses. At the same time, the public universities already had in place academic standards and criteria governing their various courses of study. Given such an environment, LAN decided to develop its own criteria and standards for assessing and accrediting the various courses of study conducted by PHEIs in the country. The criteria and standards formulated were very much influenced by the criteria and standards practised by the public universities, established Quality Assurance Bodies abroad such as the NMA in New Zealand and OAA in the United Kingdom which were close to our system of education.
Lessons Learned

With the formulation of the criteria and standards as the benchmark for assessment and accreditation, LAN started to assess the applications for the approval of courses of study and accredit these courses offered by PHEIs beginning January, 1998. From the implementation and experience in the assessment and accreditation work, the lessons learnt are as follows:

1. Appreciation of the Quality Culture

The introduction of the quality culture in private sector education in Malaysia on a national basis is a recent development although it cannot be denied that some of the individual PHEIs also have instituted their own quality mechanisms in dealing with the academic programmes. Such a practice however differs from the quality process instituted on the academic programmes undertaken by the public universities, where an academic programme is initially examined by a Board of Study, the Senate and the University's Council/Board. The programme is then submitted to the MOE for approval where it is first examined by the Higher Education SubCommittee chaired by the Secretary-General and finally referred to the Educational Planning Committee chaired by the Minister.

To date, LAN has received about 2911 applications consisting 2688 applications for approval and 223 applications for accreditation. Given a conservative estimate that one PHEI conducts 10 courses of study, there should be a total of 6,000 courses of study. More than half of the academic programmes are yet to be subject to the quality assurance of LAN via the criteria and standards that has been designed to assess and accredit the academic programme. A major implication arising from such a requirement is the need to consistently educate both the PHEIs and the public on the necessity of quality assurance and the benchmarking that is embedded with it. Some PHEIs still shy away from the quality assurance process because of the lack of confidence in meeting the standards and criteria set by LAN.

2. Documentation

LAN's process, to a great extent is dependent on the submission of documents pertaining to the general structure of the course of study, teaching staff, syllabus of all subjects offered, facilities available, the management system and the rationale for conducting the course of study. From the applications submitted so far, about 300 applications have been returned or referred back to the PHEIs for correction in particular on the difficulty to meet the criteria and standards set. The inability to submit documents as per LAN's format continue to occur in spite of seminars and workshops conducted to help the PHEIs. Our latest addition to the existing seminars and workshop is the implementation of a weekly consultation clinic which focuses on the preparation of documents and necessary assistance for them to understand the criteria and standards established by LAN, for a small fee of RM 2,500. In spite of such efforts, there are PHEIs who are still struggling to prepare an acceptable complete document. In such cases, LAN offers special consultancy session with target groups confined to the personnel of the particular PHEIs concerned.
3. The Acceptance of a Multi-System

Malaysia has long been exposed to the various systems of higher education provided by other countries. This is because Malaysia practices a policy of sending its students and scholars overseas to be trained in various fields. However, due to the economic decline as well as the ambitious policy of making Malaysia as the centre of excellence in the region, there is a considerable decline in the number of students going overseas to study. On the other hand, there is tremendous growth in the number of higher educational institutions established locally to cater for the increasing demand for places to study.

This led to a variety of academic programmes and courses being offered included twinning programmes such as the 2+11 and 3+0 courses offered by universities abroad with the cooperation of the local PHEIs. The variety of courses offered was further complimented by the so-called professional and examination bodies abroad which offered various types of courses. The variety of courses offered provided by the PHEIs with different academic structure and system posed as a major challenge to LAN in ensuring the quality of such courses. As a result, the use of a uniform benchmark in assessing and accrediting the courses was not only difficult but also seen as inappropriate by the PHEIs. The policy to accept the multi-system of offering diplomas and degrees may not necessarily be compatible with the procedure of using a common criteria and standard based on the local public institution of higher learning. To reconcile this incompatibility, LAN assesses the levels of courses offered by foreign bodies based on its local equivalent. This is to ensure that the Malaysian public is not mislead by such courses when in reality it is of a lesser value for money compared to the local qualifications offered.

4. Local Elements

Initially, the foreign courses offered on the 3+0 basis were accepted in its pure form. However, increasingly there was considerable justification to assess such courses in comparison with the local course of study. More so, there is a national agenda to equip the local students with courses of study that meets the needs of the nation especially the local industry similar to those offered by the public universities in order to have a convergence in the development of the public and private higher education sectors. At the same time, there are local issues peculiar to each discipline of which local students need to be aware, especially considering that when they graduate they are going to work for the local industry. Fortunately, the foreign universities are more than willing to accept LAN's suggestions to changes to their courses which are offered to students in Malaysia.

5. The Dilemma of Credit Value

Generally, LAN adopts a credit value of 120 hours for a Bachelor's degree and 90 credits for a Diploma. However, there are courses offered which do not meet such requirements. For example there are difficulties encountered in assessing foreign degrees which have lower credit values but the acceptance of a multi-system puts LAN in a dilemma.

Again, there are arguments about what constitutes a credit value. In the beginning LAN defined one credit as equivalent to a one hour lecture per week for 14 weeks (a semester). In addition, it also stipulated one and half hours of tutorial as equivalent to one credit value. However, the current trend seems to confine credit value to focus solely on lectures. It
considers tutorials merely as a process of enhancement without any real load to the student. To the PHEIs who have a small number of students at any particular time, the flexibility to include tutorials as contributing to the credit value will be of considerable advantage.

Another dimension to the dilemma is the attempt to put an appropriate credit value on each subject. A suitable credit value should be between three to four hours. However, there are PHEIs which attempt to attach a higher value than the norm. This would mean offering a lesser number of subjects and given the constraint of the supply of qualified teachers, such an attempt is considered inappropriate at the expense of students not getting an appropriate body of knowledge. One way of circumventing the problem is to benchmark the appropriate number of subjects required for each level. In this way, the students will get better value for money from the courses.

6. Standards Pertaining to Teachers

LAN requires that any PHEI offering a course of study at Diploma or Degree level must employ at least 60% permanent teachers who are qualified at least one level higher, have sufficient experience, been involved in professional bodies/associations, conducted research, have publications and also involved in consultancy. However, the experience of initial evaluation of documentation shows that many PHEIs do not meet these requirements fully and a large number who are employed to teach have the same level of qualification as the programmes they are teaching. Sometimes they lack sufficient experience or expertise/specialisation in the areas they teach. For newer colleges, it is sometimes a dilemma as to what should be provided first. Without the approval, they would not be unable to attract or engage lecturers which is costly, but without adequate teachers it is difficult for LAN to recommend for approval.

The teacher's qualification may also vary with the kind of courses offered. The benchmark set maybe too rigid to accommodate the unconventional academic programmes such as the modular model, e-learning and virtual learning. The requirements for teachers in these areas may be different in that a single benchmark for teachers may not be appropriate. Since the supply of qualified teachers is a major constraint, there are PHEIs who engage foreign lecturers to conduct lectures intensively for a short duration in a way different from the norm. For the technical and vocational courses which emphasise a great deal of hands-on practicals, the requirement for teachers may also differ from the conventional programmes. Such programmes may require teachers who are less academically qualified but have vast working experience in the relevant fields which could contribute directly to the hands-on programmes. Realising the need to accommodate the varying requirements of teachers as per academic programme, LAN continues to organise special workshops involving experts in the particular fields to generate specific requirements as benchmarks in determining the kind of teachers needed for the different courses of study.

7. Details on the Subjects Offered

Among other things, PHEIs are required to provide the details on all the subjects offered for a particular course of study. LAN uses the credit system to describe an academic programme such as a minimum of 120 credit for a degree and 90 credit for a diploma. Sometimes PHEIs offer courses which are not based on the credit system which the panel of assessors sometimes find it difficult to evaluate. To overcome such a difficulty, the PHEIs offering such courses are
guided to determine the equivalents using LAN's benchmark as the basis for their documentation. Under such circumstances, a great deal of tolerance, patience and understanding is needed by all parties concerned. Besides, sufficient details should be provided pertaining to the objectives and synopsis of the subjects offered together with the publications required to be referred by each subject. Because of the complexity in preparation for such documentation, there is a tendency for PHEIs to submit incomplete documents pertaining to the curriculum leading to unnecessary delays in assessing the course.

8. Inadequate Facilities

One of the requirements under the PHEI Act is that PHEIs conducting courses of study must satisfy the Minister as to the arrangement and suitability of facilities for the students in order to provide a reasonably good learning environment. LAN's experience shows that some of the PHEIs are situated in an environment that is not conducive to learning and teaching with merely classrooms, white boards, chairs and tables with overhead projectors and small unequipped libraries. The benchmark requires that they should provide IT facilities with computer labs for students to do their research, assignments and related studies on-line thereby creating an IT literate individual and knowledgeable worker to meet the requirements of the industry. In this regard, PHEIs are encouraged to endeavour in improving the learning environment and facilities to meet the benchmarks established especially to provide adequate library resources which is an essential learning component.

Learning Environment

In conclusion, it has to be admitted that the quality assurance process in Malaysia is dynamic and operates in a learning environment. The criteria and standards set as the benchmark continue to be updated to meet the changing requirements. Under such circumstances, LAN would have no choice but to continue to be a learning organisation in order to be able to cope with the changing requirements of quality assurance and benchmarking. The challenge ahead for LAN is on how to continuously manage and reconcile the demands of the varying status and forms of institutions of higher learning as well as the variety of courses offered with the criteria and standards set for quality assurance.
Quality Assurance in Philippine Higher Education: Lessons Learned

By

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Preliminaries

Colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen:

The paper I am to present is comprised of two major parts. First I shall describe quality assurance as it is practised in the Philippines. This shall cover quality indicators and quality assurance mechanisms. The second part shall deal with lessons learned from past initiatives, what the Philippines has done to address present challenges in terms of quality assurance and what directions are we moving towards in the new century.

PART 1: QUALITY ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Introduction

Since the 1990s, quality and quality assurance have become the key themes for education in many countries not only in Asia and the Pacific region but also in the rest of the world. More and more people are concerned about the products or outputs of universities and colleges, whether societies are getting the real value for their investments in higher education. Harman (1996) points to the following main concerns on the quality issues that presently dominate the debates on higher education: 1) maintenance and improvement of levels of teaching, learning, research and scholarship; 2) improvement in the quality and adaptability of graduates; 3) how to define and measure quality; 4) whether management approaches of universities and colleges improve outcomes; 5) the use of benchmarking and performance indicators; and 6) how to convince stakeholders that institutions and systems are doing a competent job in ensuring quality outputs.

In the past, universities and government agencies just used different terms such as academic standards, standards of degrees and diplomas, student assessment, and accountability. But the main issue also was largely about maintaining academic standards according to some national or international norm, the maintenance and improvement of levels of teaching and learning, and how to provide sufficient financial and other resources to achieve quality higher education. As can be observed, many of these issues are still significant today, but the new quality debate is centred largely on the achievement of quality outcomes; which necessitates the establishment of appropriate internal quality auditing and quality management processes not only to continuously monitor achievement, and to ensure rising achievement developing but also to determine and implement the quality policy and such as the management of quality control and improvement. More importantly, major stakeholders should be convinced and assured that institutions and systems are doing a competent job in ensuring quality outputs.
The Issue of Quality in Philippine Higher Education

In the Philippines, 20 years after the last study in 1970 by the Presidential Commission to Survey Philippine Education (PCSPE), a deep, well-rounded, consolidated dissection of the state of education and training was conducted by the Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM) in 1991 to 1993 and centred on the issues confronting quality and governance. The Philippine Task Force on Higher Education (1995) focused on the sources of inefficiency, equity as well as quality in higher education and the Presidential Commission to Educational Reform 2000 (PCER) focused on areas not yet implemented as a result of enrollment, imbalance distribution, low internal efficiency, inadequacy of research projects, under-investment and poor quality, mismatch between programmes and graduates and between employment and society needs and limited and underdeveloped graduate education.

Confronted with these pressing issues and concerns on quality and to eradicate the problems that hamper the development of higher education in the Philippines, one of the major reforms espoused by the EDCOM with the passage of Republic Act 7722 May of 1994, was the establishment of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) as a department-level agency and as a separate and independent body from the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) and the creation of Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). This paved the way to having agencies of government, which will provide the needed attention and proper focus in improving the state of higher education in the country.

Higher education in the Philippines is a very large system dominated by the private sector. Of the total 1,403 higher education institutions (HEIs) 83.61 per cent are private, the rest are public. The average enrolment for the past five academic years is 2,131,650 and the average number of graduates is 384,489. With a very big system such as this and considering the present educational context, the existing support mechanisms in the system, both internal and external, and the challenges of globalisation, determining and assessing the quality of higher education inputs, outputs and even the processes poses a crucial issue if improvement in the system has to be undertaken, or if quality assurance mechanism has to be put in place. Basically, the situation or conditions, prevailing in the Philippine higher education system for so many years in the past boils down to the main issue which is quality. But there is another pressing issue that should be addressed—how can quality of higher education be assessed or measured in a more systematic and effective way?

Quality Indicators

What really is quality education? Is there a universal definition of quality education? On the higher level, there appears to be a consensus among educators that the term refers to the value added, mainly in economic terms, to the individual who went through the educative process. In the Philippine context, there is also a view that quality implies that the element of social value in the educative process is present, that is, the recipient's potential for growth and development must contribute to nation building. Quality therefore implies looking into what desirable changes the school wants to make for each student and the extent to which these changes have been attained.

The quality of higher education obtained by a student depends on fairly well-known factors—his/her inputs into the study (inherent abilities, motivation, and discipline) the quantity and
quality of school inputs, the effectiveness of the curriculum and teaching methods, and the quality of the school and home environment. The educational output or outcome is best measured by achievement tests. Alternatively, education quality is inferred from school inputs and the ability of the students involved.

In the case of educational outputs, in the absence of better ways of directly measuring the quality, there is alternative information used as a basis for inference. One is the perception of officials of a sample of embassies as to what are regarded as the better schools in the country which they consider to be of comparable quality to international institutions. Based on the report of the Philippine Task Force on Higher Education (1995), another measure of quality of output is the performance of graduates in the professional board or licensure examinations administered by the Philippine Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and by the Supreme Court of the Philippines in the case of bar examinations. One of the most recent reports in Chapter II of the UNESCO The Reform and Development of Higher Education in the Philippines (2000) (Biglete, et al.) indicated that the passing rate in the Philippines' Professional Board Examinations differ across the 40 professional fields.

The average passing percentage across all fields for the past seven years is 41.62 per cent. This trend shows that the improvement of performance of graduates in licensure examinations from 1992 to 1998 is almost nil. It was further identified that by professional fields, accountancy and teacher education, which are large professions, had very low average passing percentage. Based on this scenario, it can be concluded that if the quality of higher education shall be gauged solely from the performance in licensure examinations, then it can be inferred that from 1992 to 1998 the quality of higher education has not improved substantially. However, performance in licensure examinations is not the only measure of quality education.

Another indicator of quality of higher education is the accreditation of schools. Accreditation is viewed as a mechanism through which institutions voluntarily pursue educational quality through self-assessment and peer evaluation. There are benefits accruing to programmes which are accredited. To name a few, schools are given greater independence in curriculum development and in setting tuition fees, and priority in receiving grants of financial assistance. It is worth noting that a school's accredited status is of valuable information to students and employers for it establishes its academic standard. However, as of this date, still relatively few or only 13.3 per cent of the programmes of colleges and universities in the country have taken the advantage of the, benefits of accreditation. The number of accredited programmes has increased only from 282 in 1991 to 529 in 1999. It was found out that accreditation has significantly helped improve the quality of accredited schools. However, an examination of accreditation as an indicator of quality shows that only a very small number of schools enrolling a small fraction of students are of good quality.

**Quality Assurance Mechanism**

The term quality assurance refers to mechanisms and processes used to lead to the maintenance and improvement of quality outcomes. It also has come to mean a guarantee or certification that particular standards are being met. Thus, quality assurance is largely about the systematic management procedures and processes adopted to ensure achievement of a given quality, or continued improvement in quality.
In countries like the United States, the United Kingdom and the Philippines, the promotion of quality in higher education is pursued by means of the accreditation process. In the UK, the quality assurance programme gives the highest priority to inputs like procedures which improve the quality of teaching and learning. The criteria used for evaluating are focused more on teaching-learning processes itself. This is possible because all the higher education institutions in the UK have the same mode of governance, since they are all owned and managed by the government, except for one private university.

It can be noted that the quality assurance programme in the UK has been very effective because it employs the ‘carrot-and-stick’ approach with the top-performing educational institutions getting bigger budgets, from the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC). In the Philippines, the higher education system exhibits many features of the American accreditation model. Funding assistance is given to an accrediting body such as the Federation of Accrediting Associations of the Philippines (FAAP) in order to facilitate voluntary accreditation of higher education institutions. At the present time the Higher Education Development Fund (or HEDF) administered by the Philippines’ Commission on Higher Education is not a tool for the quality of education. By using merit as the basic criterion in which the allocation of financial assistance is made to the country's colleges and universities, assistance is granted on the basis of the institutions' capability, the quality of their programmes, as well as their potential for upgrading the quality of their educational services. In effect, the HEDF is designed to accomplish for the Philippines what the Higher Education Funding Council has been able to achieve in the UK, by way of making its educational institutions on par with world-class standards.

The Commission on Higher Education (CHED), aware of the current state of higher education, has so far been pursuing major development initiatives and strategies to achieve higher quality towards excellence in higher education. The following are the major reforms, programmes and projects being implemented to raise the standards of quality of higher education in the country:

1. **Operationalization of the Technical Panels** Assisting the CHED in setting standards and in programme monitoring and evaluation are the Technical Panels organized in 10 clusters of disciplines, namely: 1) agriculture education; 2) business and management education; 3) engineering, technology and architecture education; 4) health profession education; 5) humanities, social sciences and communication; 6) information technology; 7) maritime education; 8) science and mathematics; 9) teacher education and 10) legal education. These Technical Panels serving as advisory to the CHED are composed of experts, senior, specialists, academicians and practitioners in their respective fields.

2. **Standards Formulation** The CHED is continuously revitalizing higher education curricula and institutional programmes not only by developing new policies, and standards but also by reviewing and updating existing policies and standards for the bachelor's, masters and doctorate degrees in the different disciplines. These policies, standards and guidelines embody the minimum requirements for the different programmes in terms of curriculum, qualifications of deans, faculty and staff, physical facilities such as classrooms and laboratories, equipment, library facilities and other support facilities, and services.
3. **Voluntary Accreditation System** This is carried out by separate accrediting associations related to higher educational associations and have now joined to form the Federation of Accrediting Associations of the Philippines (FAAP)

4. **Monitoring and Evaluation** The CHED through its Regional Office conducts continuous monitoring and evaluation of programmes of higher education institutions to determine their extent of compliance to the minimum standard and thereby impose sanctions on substandard programmes or provide financial support and incentives to good quality programme. Providing technical assistance to CHED in this undertaking are experts from academe, industry and professional associations organized as Regional Quality Assessment Team (ROATS) in the different disciplines,

5. **Identification of Centers of Excellence** CHED is strengthening public and private HEIs in the different regions which have consistently exhibited qualities indicating excellence in instruction, research and extension. The Higher Education Development Fund (HEDF) is being used to finance the various development programmes of the identified Centres of Excellence (COEs) and Centres of Development (CODs) in the different disciplines such as student scholarships, faculty and staff development, instructional materials development, library and laboratory facilities upgrading, including research and extension and networking activities. The idea is to focus resources on few institutional programmes and enhance these programmes which later on will influence the quality of:

- 18 COEs and 3 CODs in Teacher Education
- 8 COEs in Nursing Education
- 3 COEs, and 1 COD in Medicine
- 2 COEs in Music Education
- 1 COE for Distance Education
- 21 COEs and 28 CODs in Science and Mathematics
- 10 COEs, 26 CODs-category 1 and 61 CODs category 2 in Engineering and Architecture Education
- 14 CODs in Business and Management Education
- 27 COEs in Humanities, Social Sciences and Communication
- 24 CODs in information Technology Education
- 21 COEs in Agriculture Education

6. **Upgrading of Maritime Education** The Philippines is one of the major seafarers in the world. To maintain this status, there is a need for the Philippines to comply with the Standards for Training Certification Watchkeeping (STCW) 1995 and be included in the White List. As of 1999, the CHED has evaluated 100 maritime schools in the country. Based on the results of such assessment, the CHED was able to determine institutions complying with STCW and CHED requirements and has identified 22 programmes on marine transportation and 20 programmes on marine engineering which have substantially complied with the requirements. Institutions that did not comply with the standards were ordered to phase-out or immediately close their maritime programmes.

7. **Mindanao Advance Education Programme (MAEP)** This project is being implemented specifically to train a core of high-level manpower in Mindanao to accelerate the island's growth and development. It will upgrade and enhance the capabilities of 14 HEIs in Mindanao to do research and offer graduate programmes in critical disciplines through
laboratory upgrading, information technology assistance and research assistance. The disciplines covered are information technology, physics, chemistry, biology, agriculture and food security, marine biodiversity and fisheries, peace studies and languages, mathematics and industrial technology. The five-year faculty development programme provides scholarships for faculty of HEIs towards earning Master of Science and Doctor of Philosophy degrees, in 11 critical disciplines. The faculty of the institutions included in the project shall be upgraded to a level where at least 50 percent are MS/MA degree holders and that there will be at least one Ph.D. degree holder for each of the identified fields.

8. **Higher Education Research** To improve the research capacities of the HEIs, the CHED through its HEDF provides funding support in the form of research grants such as block grants, grants-in-aid, or commissioned research grants. The research priority thrusts are spelled out in the CHED's National Higher Education Research Agenda (NHERA), 1998-2007, categorized according to disciplines and other research emphases. Zonal research centers were set-up and research advocacy in higher education institutions were carried out to increase awareness and thereby improve research activities of the higher education institutions.

9. **National Agriculture and Fisheries Education System (NAFES)** Per Republic Act 8435, otherwise known as the 'Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act of 1997,' the Commission on Higher Education is spearheading the establishment of a National Agriculture and Fisheries Education System (NAFES) which is aimed to: 1) establish, maintain and support a complete and integrated system of agriculture and fisheries education relevant to the needs of the economy, the community and society. A network of National Centers of Excellence (NCEs) in the field of agriculture and fisheries education shall be established composed of qualified public and private colleges and universities. Based on the system of accreditation to be formulated and implemented by CHED, not more than one provincial institute in each province and no more than one national university in each field in every region shall be identified. The CHED, in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and other concerned agencies and institutions, is providing the leadership role as well as the funding support in the formulation or development of the various plans and programmes for NAFES as follows: a) a National Integrated Human Resource Development Plan in Agriculture and Fisheries; b) a Rationalization Plan for public and private colleges and universities that will not be designated and accredited as centres of excellence, c) Output-oriented Performance Standards (OOPS) and a computerized monitoring and evaluation system; d) a National and Integrated Continuing Agriculture and Fisheries Education Programme; e) a National Scholarship Programme for deserving academic staff; and f) a Merit System to promote academic scholarship of academic personnel.

PART II: THE PHILIPPINE CASE: LESSONS LEARNED

The case for enhancing quality and institutionalizing quality assurance in the Philippine higher education sector has not been without its difficulties and constraints. For a number of years, it can be observed that there has been an identified urgent need to develop and plan a general framework for quality assurance in the country. Though attempts have been done in the past, the Philippines has not implemented concrete actions to address this requirement. This is in
view of the fact that there is a lack of coordinated efforts in the quality assurance mechanism in the country entailing large wastage and/or duplicative systems of quality assurance. Briefly outlined in the foregoing are observations and lessons, which arose out of the application of quality intervention mechanisms mentioned above.

**On External Advice and Expert Evaluation**

One of the efforts aimed at harnessing the potential and expertise of both the public and private sectors is putting in place a 'technical panel' per discipline. As the main instrument of providing expert advice on matters pertaining to their specialized areas the technical panels provide the buffer in policy-making as well as enhancing the process of consensus and confidence building in the acceptance and implementation of standards of quality in the higher education sector. Overall, the transformation from minimal levels of quality to desirable levels was accelerated and compliance levels by institutions of higher learning dramatically improved. It must also be noted that even in the area of standard-setting through the technical panels, the influence of vested interest groups greatly diminishes the democratic and participative nature of the consultation and standards development process.

However, while the Philippines’ Commission on Higher Education has exhausted much from the professional expertise of the technical panels in their respective disciplines, there is still a need to further strengthen these technical experts, i.e. a system of both internal and external quality assurance is needed to improve educational quality and standards at all levels. Internal quality assurance among higher education institutions will entail the establishment of an in-house quality assurance system within each educational management. External quality assurance, on the other hand, in coordination with higher education institutions will involve criteria development and methods of external evaluation, and conducting the evaluation of educational achievements to determine the quality of institutions by the technical panels. This means that external quality assurance systems will be conducted among higher education institutions within a specified period of time or as recommended by the technical panels. Thus, internal and external quality assurance systems should be interdependent with each other such that higher education institutions will greatly interact with the technical panels and rely on the professional expertise on the improvement of higher education in the country.

**On Monitoring and Evaluation**

Over time, it has become apparent that resorting to external expertise and peer evaluation mechanism rather than purely in-house assessors resulted in more professional assessments and evaluation thereby creating greater acceptance of advice and outcomes. Moreover, confidence to the quality assessment process is further enhanced.

Thus, we see the need to revitalize and further fortify the expertise of the technical panels in order to perform quality assessment among institutions of higher learning. It is only imperative that these technical panels must continue to enrich the Philippine monitoring and evaluation systems.
On Linking Networks of HEIs as Centres of Excellence/Development

Although the concept of identifying and supporting Centres of Excellence or Developments in key disciplines or programmes was perceived as a key strategy in enhancing quality and accelerating institutional capability building, scarce resources are too thinly spread which somehow diminished the impact. Also the issue of sustainability is a significant concern in view of the instability in the sourcing of much needed funding. In some cases, the shotgun approach must be replaced by deliberate and purposeful focus and prioritization even within the ambit of the centers of excellence themselves. A gradual and staggered approach based on national development imperatives would have been a more prudent strategy considering the fact of funding and sustainability.

On the Unified Coordinated System of Quality Assurance for Higher Education

Under Republic Act 7722 or otherwise known as the Higher Education Act of 1994, both public and private higher education institutions are subjected to the same threshold quality standards. In the context of limited resources and the need to make higher education more responsive to social and economic goals, quality is a key mechanism for ensuring the accountability and value for money of the higher education system. A unified coordinated system of higher education governed by unified quality standards is one of the main mechanisms for ensuring and promoting quality. Thus, in some legislation (General Appropriations Acts of 1999 & 2000 - R.A. 8745 and R.A. 8760) and others in the offing, the integration of state-funded higher education institutions to existing state colleges and universities (SUCs) has been mandated. For a number of years, the uncoordinated and inefficient system has lead to the dissipation of scarce resources for human development.

It is imperative to have a unified framework for quality assurance mechanisms to be conducted among higher education institutions. However, besides serving the Philippines' Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the technical panels should also serve the Philippines' Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) in issuance of certification for professionals together with the Teacher Education Council (TEC) of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) for teacher education and Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) for technical education.

Conclusion

By 2025, at least 90 per cent of output and employment will be accounted for by industry and services. Industries will mainly be technology-based to ensure high productivity, significant value-adding and competitiveness. Industries will also be skills-intensive: the competitive advantage of the Philippine economy. 'Knowledge-based' industries will spearhead the country's strategy for development. The provision of quality education and training services is considered a prerequisite for sustained economic growth in the Asian region, and reforms currently underway in a number of regional countries are in response to the need for internationally competitive workforce. There is also recognition of the need to be responsive to the international environment in which graduates will live and work.

Indeed, there is a need to reinforce the technical panels per discipline for it to be able to perform quality assurance mechanisms among institutions. It is essential for the Commission on Higher Education to strengthen, fortify, and reinforce the expertise these Panels provide to
higher education institutions. Nonetheless, if the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) falls short in enhancing these technical panels in its contribution to quality assurance, it would be best to establish a separate agency for standard setting and educational quality assurance. By this, the newly revitalized technical panels, as a separate entity, shall continue to serve the Commission on Higher Education and higher education institutions in the country. In addition to this, the technical panels will likewise serve the PRC, TESDA and TEC of DECS, which will lessen a great deal of educational cost.

Next Step

In the ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific region, there is a growing trend that economies are now moving towards a modicum of standardization and possible recognition of minimum thresholds of quality standards. For instance, the APEC economies are in the final stages of establishing a registry of professional engineers who can undertake independent practice or employment across borders. This is in the context of the WTO and the GATS or the Generalized Agreement of Trade in Services. Therefore, the accelerated dismantling of these barriers to trade and professional human resource mobility would someday require the combined and concerted efforts of economies including ASEAN at establishing regional centres of excellence or development in higher education such as that seamless mutual recognition of credits and higher education qualifications can be realized in the region within the context of facilitating cross-border mobility of qualified professional resources.

As a consequence of such a proposal, it is envisioned that at the very least threshold standards of quality for the region may be developed in critical programmes or disciplines for regional quality assurance established in key areas including engineering education, maritime, teacher education, medical, information technology as well as science and technology.

To my mind, this is a noble, collaborative undertaking that can be seriously considered considering the dynamic nature of the region and the fast-paced development in the Asia-Pacific. Finally, the growth and excellence in higher education that various innovations seek to achieve must address the issue of total human resource development. Higher education must continue to transgress borders of time and space; of nations and economics. Excellence in higher education in the 21st century must be nurtured through collaborative efforts which could already be commenced in the region.
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Benchmarking in Medical Education

By

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Introduction

Medical colleges in Thailand have realized the importance of quality assurance in medical education for more than five decades. The Consortium of Thai Medical Schools and the Ministry of Public Health and Ministry of University Affairs had organized the workshop to develop a set of indicators for the standard of medical education in 1988. However the indicators were not fully implemented in any institution probably due to lack of enforcement and motivation. Each medical school seems to have its own way of reforming curriculum.

In July 1996, the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA) announced the policy on quality assurance in higher education, Two years later, the MUA's quality assurance project was launched on 22 academic institutions with five disciplines where the medicine is one of these disciplines. The extent aspects of educational programmes which will be assessed include 9 categories - namely:

- Educational philosophy, aims, and objectives;
- Teaching and learning activities, including curriculum, faculty staffs and students;
- Research;
- Extracurricular activities;
- Academic services;
- Thai culture and tradition;
- Administration;
- Budget; and
- Quality assurance organization and activities.

The MUA has organized several workshops to set up a set of indicators and to seek agreements on the nine categories. Also the MUA organized workshops/seminars for the internal auditors and external auditors. The MUA scheduled the external audits for the volunteer medical schools and completed the process on 10 medical schools at the end of June 2000.
Lesson learned

The lesson learned from the Quality Assurance in Medical Education will be divided into three phases:

Phase I: Prior to external audit;
Phase II: During external audit;
Phase III: After auditing.

Phase I: Prior to external audit

Each medical school faced somewhat similar difficulties to prepare for the Quality Assurance auditing due to the following:

- The staff have negative attitudes to accepting any change;
- It was a new experience for staff to apply a systematic approach to quality assurance (control, auditing, and assessment);
- Staff were not accustomed to the concept of quality in medical education - for example: quality of care, cost effectiveness, relevance, and equity.
- It took time from services and teaching.
- Documentation for guidelines was inadequate;
- A considerable amount of the budget was consumed and there was much paperwork;
- Some departmental heads lacked leadership.

After the internal audit by the Faculty of Medicine, the University and the faculty staff developed a more positive attitude towards the internal auditing and began to improve their weak points. They started to assess their goals, objectives, teaching and learning process.

Phase II: During external audit

- The duration of the external audit took four to five days. The faculty administrators had planned for the auditing and prepared the documents. The faculty members fully cooperated with the external auditors. However anxiety and stress among personnel was noticeable;
- The administrators and personnel were satisfied with verbal feedback;
- The external auditors performed as an effective team because of the good preparation of the MUA.
Phase III: After external auditing

- Most personnel appreciated being audited, however the improvement in quality and attitude of some staff seemed to be in response to the audit only;

- Personnel tried to improve their weak points, i.e. developing a portfolio, improving process of teaching and learning, etc.;

- Each medical school will now prepare to a standard medical education to be assessed by any organization in the future;

- The Thai Medical Council and Consortium of Medical Schools continue to provide full support for the quality assurance programme.

Benchmark in Medical Education

The medical schools in Thailand have set the local, national, and international medical standard as their benchmarks. Thailand is a medium size country so that each medical school has set its own local standard using the Physician Competency of the Thai Medical Council as a national standard. Also all Thai medical schools are recognized in the WHO World Medical Directory. The medical Schools are working, to improve the quality of medical education up to international standards.

In 1995, WHO set up strategies for achieving the goal 'Health for All' by Primary Health Care which include relevance, quality, cost-effectiveness, and equity. The way to success is to provide health care as a holistic approach to individual and community. The ideal product should be a competent care provider, decision-maker, leader, manager, and communicator. At the same time, the educational institutions should contribute to society to become socially accountable by shifting education from disease to health, from reactive to a proactive process to outcome, specialty to comprehension, and from accountability to peers to accountability to society.

From WHO's point of view, the education, services and research should impact on the community in terms of relevance, quality, cost effectiveness and equity. So these characteristics should be the minimum level of standard for international quality assessment. Recently, the executive council, the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) tried to establish four systems to assure minimum quality standards which fulfill international acceptance. They gave priority to the task of specifying standards or guidelines for medical education. They admitted that it was difficult to conduct international comparisons of education between each school, however common core standards already exist, such as scientific basis and the global task of educating, with the purpose of solving health problems.

The recommendation of WFME for auditing of higher education quality includes:

- Mission for the institutions;
- Objectives for the education being offered;
- Structure of the educational programme;
- Content of the programme;
• Pedagogical principles;
• Teaching methods;
• Learning materials;
• Skill acquisition;
• Assessment means;
• Outcome measurements;
• Physical facilities (libraries, lecture hall, group rooms);
• Learning environment (service and student culture);
• Information technology and networking;
• Management of the programme in terms of administration and decision making;
• Admission criteria, (number of students);
• Teacher's qualifications;
• Student's support and counseling;
• Ongoing mechanism for quality control; and
• Internationalization - (exchange of students).

At present, the Medical Education Quality Assurance Committee (MEQAC) has set the standard indicators guideline for medical schools. All medical schools are applying the QA/TQM for improving the quality of medical education to meet the needs of Thai society and WFME.

Suggestions

In order to improve the quality of medical education, the follow-up procedures should be implemented:

• The Ministry of University Affairs, Medical Council, and Consortium of Thai Medical Schools should promote the quality assurance in all medical schools;

• The administrators must maintain their role of strong leadership in medical education;

• Enough time and budget for quality assurance should be provided;

• A mechanism of continuous quality improvement should set up and maintained;

• The dissemination of quality assurance information to concerned parties should be made; and

• The improvement of the attitudes and value of personnel should be made until QA becomes their tradition and culture.
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Reform and Development of Chinese Higher Education
& Evaluation of Quality

by

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Since the nineties, higher education in China has achieved remarkable results in reform and development. A diversified higher education system has initially been set up with a great variety of disciplines, with both degree-conferring and non-degree-conferring courses, and distinct levels of higher special training courses, regular undergraduate courses and graduate courses.

Fast Growth in Scale of Higher Education

In 1999 there were 1,942 universities and colleges in the whole country, 1,071 of which were regular universities and colleges and 871 were adult education institutes. The total number of enrolment of new students for regular courses and for special training courses in 1999 was 1,596,800, and the total number of registered students was 4,134,200. The corresponding numbers for adult higher education were 1,157,700 and 3,054,200. The enrolment of new graduate students for higher institutes of learning and research institutes was 52,200, of whom 19,900 were Ph.D. students and 71,800 were MA students. The total number of registered graduate students was 233,500. From 1990 to 1999 the total number of students for regular courses and special training rose from 3,729,000 to 7,189,100, an increase of 93%. The number of graduate students rose from 93,000 to 233,500, an increase of 151%. By 1999 the gross enrolment rate of institute of higher learning reached 10.5%. There has also been fast development in self-study examination of higher education, in all kinds of non-degree-conferring higher education and in further education.

Great Progress in the Reform of Higher Education

In structural reform in running universities, the old practice of the state monopolizing the running of all institutes of higher learning has been abandoned, and now the state encourages and supports privately run institutes of higher learning. Now while the higher education is still mainly run by the state, the new phenomena is that different circles of the society and private individuals are now actively participating in running institutes of higher learning within the framework of the law.

In structural reform in management, the new practice is to share responsibility between the central government and the provincial governments, with the provincial government in control of the overall management. This puts an end to the separation and over-lapping of universities and colleges and at the same time it helps the government to streamline its administration and decentralize some of its powers to give the institutes of higher learning the right to run their
own affairs. In February 2000, the State Council decided that except for a few of its ministries and commissions such as the Ministry of Education that can continue to manage their own institutes, most departments and units of the Council will, in principle, no longer directly manage their own institutes. This is a radical departure from the old administrative structure of Chinese higher education and a new structure has taken shape.

In structural reform in raising funds, the old practice of depending entirely on government’s allocation is gradually giving way to raising funds through various channels while the government is still the main source for educational funds.

In system reform of enrolment, paying fees, employment after graduation, the principle that all citizens enjoy equal rights to higher education is strictly maintained while practising a system of appropriate tuition fee. Also scholarships to academically excellent students and in moral conduct, grants, loans and part work and part study for students with financial needs, tuition waiver and financial aid for students with special financial difficulties, are all part of the new system. After graduation, most students can choose their jobs under the guidance of the country’s policy.

**Remarkable Results in Construction and Reform of Teaching and Learning**

In July 1998 the Ministry of Education completed the revision of cataloguing of majors for regular universities. With the total numbers of different majors being reduced to 249 from the original 504, the design of majors is now more scientific and the field has been broadened.

In 1994, the Ministry of Education has implemented the *Reform Plan of Teaching Contents and Curriculum of Higher Education for the 21st Century*, officially approved to set up 221 principle programmes and close to a thousand sub-programmes. More than 10,000 teachers have participated in this work. This reform plan involves every educational aspect including ideological concepts, teaching contents, structure of curriculum and teaching methodology, etc.

By 1998, the state has selected 84 universities as bases for training human resources in fundamental sciences, 51 universities in fundamental liberal arts, 45 in fundamental engineering and 13 in fundamental economics. These 'bases' have greatly enforced the basic sciences training programme.

In 1995, the Ministry of Education put forward the demand to raise the cultural standard of university students and in this connection 52 universities across the country were chosen as the experimental ground. It also approved a plan to make another 32 universities as ‘bases in raising the standard of general cultural education’.

By the end of 1998, the Ministry of Education has launched the project of 'modern distance education'. Presently, 31 universities are carrying out the experimental work on this project. At the same time, the Ministry has gathered specialists to develop high-end software for educational purpose, in order to build up a databank for distance education as well as several educational software development centers.
The Development of Scientific Research

At present there are 153 state key laboratories in the country, 100 of which are in universities. At the same time, the institutes of higher learning have set up 20 state engineering research centers.

The institutes of higher learning are taking an active part in hi-tech park building and initiating their own hi-tech industries, realizing a linking of teaching, research and production. At present the state has approved hi-tech parks in 15 institutes of higher learning, and at the same time the Ministry of Education has already started to implement the 'Project to industrialize the hi-tech of institutes of higher learning.

To Build First Rate Universities

In October 1995, approved by the State Council, the Ministry of Education, the State Planning Commission and the Ministry of Finance jointly published the Project '211' of Overall Construction Plan. Presently, 101 institutes of higher learning are taking part in the Project '211'. Meanwhile, the state has initiated 599 scientific construction projects in 100 project-oriented institutes. Also, the state has invested heavily on several universities, with the goal of rendering them the first rate universities at an international level in the near future.

Active International Exchange

Since the last two decades, China has established educational exchange and co-operation relationship with 154 countries and areas. We have sent nearly 300,000 students to study in more than 100 countries and areas and have received around 210,000 students from 160 countries and areas. We have sent more than 1800 teachers and experts to teach abroad and have invited and recruited more than 40,000 from abroad to teach in China. The state practises the policy of 'supporting students studying abroad, encouraging them returning home and complete freedom of coming and going'.

Way to a Legal System in Higher Education

On August 29th 1998, the Fourth Session of the Ninth standing committee of National Congress approved the 'Higher Education Law of the People’s Republic of China' which is implemented from January 1st 1999. This is the first complete higher education law in a true legislative sense.

Vitalizing the Chinese Higher Education in the 21st Century

In January 1999, the State Council approved the Plan of Action to Revitalize the Education in the 21st Century. This plan stipulates that by 2010 the rate of higher education entrance should reach or approach 15%. Some institutes of higher learning and some important disciplines should reach or approach the first rank on an international level; a system of continuous education should be in basic shape. Presently, the Ministry of Education is in the process of drafting the 'Ten Five' plan aiming at developing the education in China.

In June 1999, the Chinese government convened the third national conference on education. The purpose of the conference is to mobilize the entire people in raising the national quality
and the inventive capacity as a priority. Also, the people should take part in the educational reform, in pushing forward the education of people’s quality in all aspects in order to revitalize the country by means of science and education. Higher education should emphasize the inventive, practical and entrepreneurial capacities of the university students, so that the standard of their humanity and science qualities will be raised. We believe that in the new century, higher education will develop by leaps and bounds.

The switch in Chinese economic structure and the fast development and reform of higher education also pushed forward the setting up and perfection of the assessment system of higher education. The Higher Education Law promulgated in 1999 laid down that: ‘Educational administrative departments should supervise over the standard of the institutes of higher learning and organize the assessment of the quality of the teaching’.

In the eighties assessment work in higher education was mainly concentrated on the disciplines, subjects, courses etc. In October 1990 the state promulgated Provisional regulations on educational assessment of regular institutes of higher learning. After that there has been much theoretical research and practical work on the assessment in institutes of higher learning. Assessment standards and norms are being perfected and much practical experience is being gained.

Assessment of Teaching in Institutes of Higher Learning

In early 1995, the Ministry of Education decided to assess the teaching of regular courses in institutes of higher learning. The work was to be carried out in steps. There are three main types of assessment: qualification assessment, outstanding assessment and random assessment. Qualification assessment is applied to newly founded institutes with a comparatively weak basis, and the result of the assessment could be qualified: defer pass, and not pass. The Ministry of Education decides on the institute for assessment. Outstanding assessment is applied to high level institutes with a long history and of very sound basis. The institute applies to the Ministry of Education, which decides on the assessment. Random assessment applies to institutes that are in between the above two categories, and the assessment scale is excellent, good, qualified, or not qualified.

Up to April 2000, the Ministry of Education had assessed 160 institutes, 34 of which did not pass the first time, (21%). Thirteen institutes applied for outstanding assessment and two did not pass the first time. Random assessment was tried out in one institute.

Assessment of Postgraduate Education of Institutes of Higher Learning

In 1985 the Degree Committee of the State Council started to inspect and assess the quality of the degrees conferred on research students, and also the research disciplines and subjects. In 1994 Institute for Assessing the Quality of Degree and Graduate Education in Institutes of Higher Learning and Research was founded. This institute has gradually taken up the work of organizing and carrying out the assessment of the quality of degrees and the education of research students. In 1996 and 1997 it carried out large-scale inspection and assessment of the educational level of Ph.D. and MA programmes all over the country.
Beginning from 1999, the Ministry of Education selects 100 superior Ph.D. theses each year from all over the country. This plays an important role in raising the standard of Ph.D. courses.

**To build up a databank on the assessment work**

In May 1998, the Ministry of Education set up a 'committee to assess the undergraduate and special courses in ordinary institutes of higher education'.

In 1997, the Ministry of Education started work on the *Ministry of Education Databank of the Basic States of Ordinary Institutes of Higher Education*. This databank is now basically established and is playing its role in the assessment work. It gives a basic description of the developing status of the ordinary institutes of higher education. It can publish its results on Internet, be consulted and indexed. In 1999, the Internet address for the assessment of the higher education has been legally registered ([www.assessmen.edu.cn](http://www.assessmen.edu.cn)) and is now being built up. *Assessment Experts of Higher Education* is also being built up.

**Step up the Research to Perfect Higher Education Assessment**

Entering the new century, economic and social changes are undergoing drastic changes on a global scale, and higher education is faced with unprecedented opportunities and challenges. This calls on us to change our old ideas on education and go in for educational reform. We should re-assess our views on the aims of higher education and the function and role of the institutes of higher learning. The fast development of modern information technology is continuously extending the time, space and function of higher education. The traditional institutes of higher learning are continuously imbued with new content, and new type of universities is showing new life force. All this poses new tasks and goals for the assessment of higher education.

On the basis of our past work and taking into account of the new development of the higher education both in our country and abroad, we will carry on the research of the assessment theory. We will perfect the setting up of the assessment rules and optimize the assessment scheme and the assessment index system. It is foreseeable that along with the further development of the higher education in China in the 21st century, a system guaranteeing the quality of the higher education and an assessment system will gradually be perfected. It will at the same time bear Chinese characteristics and also conform to the international standard.
IV. CLOSING ADDRESS
Closing Address

By

Associate Professor Dr. Vanchai Sirichana
Permanent Secretary for University Affairs of Thailand

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel truly privileged to have this opportunity to share with you some remarks at the close of our highly successful conference. For three full days we have been engaging in delightful and productive deliberations. I know that it is a tiring function, but I have no doubt that we have most substantially benefited from the exchange and sharing of knowledge and experiences.

Like most other schemes of things in today's world, 'quality' cannot be treated in isolation. As universities themselves are becoming, to use the words of one of our speakers, 'communities without intellectual and geographical borders’, their quality is increasingly judged through international standards. Thus, it is not surprising during our three-day discussions that in the diversity of experiences we have accumulated and lessons learned we find many recurrent themes that reflect the commonality of our interests and concerns.

To emphasise the central relevance of those themes, let me reiterate some of them here. In doing this, I have significantly drawn upon many speakers and participants, but I apologise for not being able to explicitly acknowledge all of them.

We are well aware, especially after our fruitful exchanges and discussions, that a quality system of some form or another has been adopted almost everywhere now, and various mechanisms for quality assurance have also been widely put in place. Despite some lingering complaints and negative reactions from academic staff, there is no doubt about quality and standards now being vital parts of the scholarly enterprise.

The crucial driving forces behind this development are the growing global pressures, together with the interest in promoting public confidence in higher education and the demand for accountability of universities to the wider public. Strong forces have made it imperative for higher educational institutions to aim at quality and standards that are nationally and internationally recognised.

The new scholarly landscape has brought with it tensions that cannot be easily resolved, most notably those between autonomy and accountability, and between quality and massification of higher education. Quality assurance (QA) must thus be conceived as an ongoing process in which there needs to be an intersection of institutional and national perspectives. While the ultimate responsibility for QA rests with individual universities, their autonomy must be exercised in such a way as to accommodate the expectations and concerns of a wide range of stakeholders, particularly the students, the funding agencies and the professional bodies.
As some of us have suggested, the key terms here are adaptability and flexibility of the quality evaluation frameworks. Moreover, all QA mechanisms must not only be seen as fair and consistent, but also clearly communicated to, and fully understood by all concerned.

It is apparent from the presentations that each country or university has developed both its own QA system and agenda. Through the refinement of a code of best practice, some universities aim to become the standard-bearers for higher education in their country; others rather seek to build up certain core competencies, or certain distinctive strengths, that will provide them with a 'niche' in the global arena.

In face of the rising globalising forces, however, it is quite understandable that part of a country's, or university's, agenda is its networking across national borders. As one speaker has emphasised, this involves not simply the normal exchange and cooperation but more significantly some kind of strategic alliance and partnership. In so far as quality assurance is concerned, this increasingly means the need to come up with international benchmarks for comparing standards as well as professional accreditation.

The ultimate aim, it seems, is for each country's degrees to be globally recognised. Though for many of us, perhaps, that is still a long way to go. However, we have learned, especially from the European experience, that some efforts have already been made in this direction.

The so-called Bologna Principle has sought to coordinate quality frameworks and QA mechanisms, such that a degree awarded anywhere in Europe would be recognised and accepted by both academic institutions and employers right across the Continent, and indeed globally. Such an initiative, I believe, could prove a most valuable lesson for countries in the Asia-Pacific.

As I already noted in my keynote address on the opening day of the conference, the Asiaweek ranking of universities in this region has instigated much interest in international benchmarking. Of course, the annual ranking seems to have exposed wide disparities in many aspects of universities in the region and have understandably caused considerable frustrations and discontent in some quarters. Nevertheless, it has at least made quality and standards matters of real concern among the regional states.

There have already arisen pressures for closer collaboration. With the spread of 'transnational' and other forms of 'education at a distance', if I may refer to the presentation of one of our speakers, 'international QA' has become a real issue. Here I will simply point out some of the implications that have been already raised for discussion.

There has been in recent years a growth of off-shore and cross-border operations of higher educational institutions. Both the home and host countries of these institutions naturally need to more closely monitor their activities. Effective mechanisms, such as an international QA agency or at least some form of collaboration involving sharing of information as well as even some extent of deregulation on the part of both home and host countries to allow for the external validation of academic learning, seem inevitable.

Indeed, with the greater mobility of students and workforce, universities all over the world must come to grips with issues relating to credit transfer, mutual recognition of awards, and employability. Universities may have to provide formal study as well as continuous
professional development (CPD) programmes that are internationally recognised. All this requires international QA.

'Internationalisation of QA' has in fact received growing attention. We have learned from this conference that some progress has been made in this respect. A number of international mechanisms, such as the Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE), have been initiated to address issues relating to the quality of cross-border educational operations and offerings. Moreover, national QA agencies, most notably the QAA in the UK, have also begun to operate internationally to oversee off-shore operations and cooperative ventures of their higher educational institutions.

Another important suggestion from the conference is for existing formal structures like UNESCO to assume a more active role in encouraging and supporting international QA.

All suggestions and possibilities should be seriously considered by all concerned. In the Asia-Pacific region, cooperation under such mechanisms as University Mobility in the Asia Pacific (UMAP), among others, could be further enhanced and expanded. It is my hope that after this greater collaborative effort will be made to promote international benchmarking.

In closing, I wish to thank all participants for your valuable part in this conference. I hope that apart from the highly fruitful deliberations all of you have had a pleasant stay in Bangkok. To those of you who have come a long way to join us here, I would like to reiterate my most sincere thanks.

I hope that some of our foreign guests at least will stay on for another day or two to enjoy our Loykratong Festival, which will be taking place all over the country tomorrow. I wish all of you a safe journey home.
V. SUMMARY REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE
Conference Summary

By

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Introduction

This summary attempts to bring together the main themes and issues discussed during the three days of conference deliberations. This is no easy task, especially in view of the numerous important topics that were covered and the rich and varied country and institutional experiences that were so well described in both printed papers and presentations.

Without doubt, this was a most important and timely conference. Quality and quality assurance in higher education are major issues around the world and, as so many of the conference speakers convincingly demonstrated, particularly across the Asia-Pacific region. At the opening of the conference, conference participants heard from the Thailand Minister of University Affairs about the importance that the Government of Thailand is placing on quality assurance and new initiatives that will flow from the National Education Act of 1999. As the conference discussions proceeded, many other speakers demonstrated both country and institutional commitments to new quality assurance efforts, and the variety in experimentation that is taking place.

Governments within the region are increasingly recognising the vital importance of maintaining and enhancing the standards of academic and professional qualifications, and the need for new efforts to be made in order to ensure that all courses meet both employer and student needs. They also are conscious of the urgent need to secure wider international recognition for the awards of universities and colleges in the region. A number of countries already have in place well-developed systems of quality assurance – Korea, India, New Zealand, and Malaysia with regard to private higher education, to name a few. Others have had successful pilot projects, or are embarking on major new initiatives, such as the establishment in Australia of a new Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) as a joint federal-state government initiative. Many individual institutions too have impressive internal mechanisms in place - for example, the National University of Singapore and a number of universities in Thailand in relation to medical education.

Conference Objectives and Their Realisation

The conference clearly was a great success, by whatever indicators we might choose to use for evaluation. I draw attention to the impressive numbers of participants, to the wide range of countries represented, to the high quality of the papers and presentations, and to the high degree of interest in the various sessions. Various speakers effectively brought together a wealth of information about initiatives being taken in the region, as well as important detail on
recent trends internationally. Within the region, there are numerous examples of new developments that effectively bridge the gap between public and private institutions, and between theory and practice.

The Conference organisers displayed great wisdom in defining the particular conference focus. Conference participants agreed that sincere thanks were due to the two conference sponsors – the Ministry of University Affairs of Thailand and UNESCO PROAP – and to the various collaborating organisations. Particular thanks and congratulations also are due to the Thailand Ministry of University Affairs for superb conference organisation and generous hospitality.

The conference documentation clearly set out the objectives of the conference. In essence, the aim was to facilitate sharing of information and experience between countries and institutions on quality assurance; to identify best practice; to develop recommendations; and to facilitate further international cooperation and networking in relation to quality assurance.

Without doubt, substantial and important progress was made towards these ends. But from a longer term perspective, the real success of the conference will depend on how effectively the participants carry back new insights to their institutions and organisations, feed these into the policy development processes, and take positive steps to facilitate both regional collaboration and institutional cooperation.

In his opening speech, His Excellency the Prime Minister of Thailand highlighted the value of regional collaboration. Many of the following speakers took up the same theme. Clearly there are exciting possibilities here, especially since the Asia-Pacific region displays such impressive diversity not only in higher education provision but also in its rich and varied experience of evaluation and quality assurance. In particular, considerable benefit can be derived by deliberate efforts in sharing experience and documentation, providing to all interested parties detailed information on good practice, and building networks for ongoing dialogue and exchange of documentation. One important suggestion made was that, at a minimum, threshold standards of quality for the region should be developed in critical programs or disciplines and a unified framework for regional quality assurance be established in key areas.

**The New Concern About Quality Assurance**

Concern about quality in higher education is not new in the Asia-Pacific region (Harman 1996). For many years, institutions and ministries within the region have had in place various mechanisms to uphold the academic standards of courses and degrees, including the use of external examiners, regular departmental and course reviews at institutional levels, establishment of accreditation processes, and use of various kinds of audits conducted by ministries. For example, a number of countries with strong connections with Britain for many years have had well developed systems of external examiners while others have had long experience with accreditation mechanisms. In his keynote address, Professor Shih Choon Fong, for example, explained the important role of external examiners in the quality assurance processes of the National University of Singapore. Under this system, senior academics from leading overseas universities are appointed to scrutinise examinations papers; they also visit the respective departments at least once in a two-year term, sit in at project presentations, and
examine marked scripts and theses. The National University of Singapore also uses international academic advisory panels for each Faculty to ensure the quality of its research output.

But what is new about recent initiatives with regard to quality assurance, is the use of more formal and deliberate mechanisms of review and reporting, and recognition of the value of new ways of demonstrating to a wider group of stakeholders the standing and relevance of degrees. The new emphasis of quality assurance in higher education too is about more systematic monitoring of performance, about providing evidence to substantiate claims about quality, and ensuring course relevance to community needs (Harman and Meek 2000). To use the language of the QAA of the UK, as reported to the conference by Ms Carole Webb, the role of quality assurance is ‘to promote public confidence that the quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced’. Further, there is wide acceptance today that quality assurance systems should cover all higher education institutions in both public and private sectors. Similarly, they should cover research universities as well as institutes of technology, community colleges, teachers colleges and short-cycle institutions.

The new quality assurance agenda in the various countries of the region is driven by a range of influences and pressures. Particularly important is the need to demonstrate appropriate academic standards in rapidly expanding and more diverse higher education systems, growing demands from employers and the professions for improved quality of provision, and increased pressures for increased public accountability. Many countries across the region are experiencing unprecedented rates of expansion, such as that reported by speakers from China, Vietnam and Indonesia. Such expansion places tremendous pressures on providers and the limited resources available, in turn often raising major concerns about whether or not academic standards are being maintained.

Global economic and social changes are the backdrop against which many of these pressures for stronger quality assurance systems operate – increased international competitiveness, expanded use of new communications and information technology, a move from industrial-based to knowledge-based industries, the need for greater emphasis on human resource development and nurturing talent, increased inter-country mobility of students and graduates, and the need to eliminate cases of poor or unsatisfactory performance within higher education institutions.

But, as well, in particular countries there are other important drivers, such as expansion of private higher education, the increased use of distance education and open learning, expansion of transnational education including the opening of branch campuses by foreign universities, the desire of particular governments to achieve an increased measure of competition between institutions and an enhanced level of institutional performance, pressures to provide more information on courses and academic requirements to assist student choice, and the possibility of using quality assurance and academic standards as levers to achieve increased public and private funding.
Key Concepts

Various speakers quite rightly pointed to difficulties in defining key terms, such as quality, quality assurance, and quality assessment. This was brought out well by Professor Vanchai in his opening keynote address when he referred to different conceptions of quality, including quality as ‘something exceptional, perfection or consistency, value for money, fitness for purpose and transformation’ and quality as ‘service’. The recent international literature on quality and quality assurance in higher education supports this view, revealing considerable difficulties and ambiguities in the definition of a number of key terms. This is not surprising, however, as quality deals with complex notions and within universities every day the word ‘quality’ can be used in different ways.

But despite these difficulties, there is a growing broad consensus about what we mean by quality and quality assurance, and recognition of the need to further strengthen quality assurance mechanisms. There is also recognition of the need to convey to all stakeholders what is meant by quality assurance in particular contexts, why new quality assurance processes are being introduced, what performance and other information will be collected in quality assurance efforts and who will have access to information and reports.

By the word quality in the context of higher education, in essence we mean judgements about the level of goal achievement, and the value and worth of that achievement. To put this another way, quality involves judgements about the degree to which activities or outputs have desirable characteristics, according to some norm or against particular specified criteria or objectives. Ball (1985) refers to quality as 'fitness for purpose.' According to this definition, a course of study in a higher education institution is of satisfactory quality when it conforms to the particular standards or levels of achievement for the purpose it was designed. In the absence of any overall agreed standards in a higher education system, it is necessary for institutions to specify their mission, goals and objectives and then be evaluated against these.

In his keynote address, Dr Edwards extended Ball’s idea of ‘fitness for purpose’ to include ‘fitness of purpose’. In other words, quality of courses are those that not only achieve well in terms of their defined objectives, but are ones whose purposes and objectives themselves have been subject to close scrutiny.

Quality in higher education can be judged from different perspectives and using different criteria. For example, the quality of a particular course could be judged not only by the extent to which it meets the needs of stakeholders but also by the extent to which it meets equity considerations, how it meets needs of individual learners, the extent to which it achieves recognised international standards, and how it measures up in terms of the outcomes achieved in relation to the resources used. In particular situations, it is helpful to indicate the perspective being employed and criteria being used to make judgements.

The term quality assurance has come into the higher education vocabulary only over the past decade or so. While there are many definitions of quality assurance in the literature, in essence, quality assurance refers to systematic management and assessment procedures adopted to monitor performance and achievements, and to ensure achievement of specified quality or improved quality. Some authors (eg Brennan 1997) prefer use of the term quality assessment instead of the term quality assurance. However, while a great deal of the effort in quality assurance relates to quality assessment, quality assurance is generally conceived as a
broader term which embraces not only assessment but also other activities including, for example, communication of assessment results to stakeholders and follow-up efforts aimed to achieve improvement.

While the concept of quality assurance is new, many of the ideas behind the concept are by no means recent in origin. What is new, however, apart from the new language, is a more systematic and far reaching approach to monitoring performance and ensuring that institutions and systems have in place appropriate and effective mechanisms for review and assessment, and for renewal and improvement. Compared with past approaches, the new mechanisms also put much more emphasis on external scrutiny, seeking the views of employers and graduates and, in various ways, making the results of assessments more widely available. Quality assurance demands not only that claims be made about quality achievements, but that such claims be accompanied by appropriate evidence.

How the concepts of quality and quality assurance are operationalised in practice, understandably, varies to some extent between societies and institutions. As Professor Vanchai emphasised,

... each university community has its own corporate culture stemming from its philosophy, and physical and academic environments. Institutions have thus accumulated diverse experiences and nurtured their own ways of thinking, working, and determining their satisfactory degree of confidence. I therefore stress the importance of tailor-made systems for each institution.

**Academic Standards**

An early major sub-theme in the conference discussions was standards – primarily, the academic standards of courses and awards. This is a difficult area (Anderson, Johnson and Milligan 2000). Who should define standards and how should they be defined? How do faculty committees effectively take into account the needs of intellectual rigour with the demands for relevance and applied skills? How can local needs be balanced against the pressures for following international standards?

Clearly there is the need for wide consultation amongst key stakeholders. Academic staff, and particularly heads of departments and deans, have an important role, and the worth of any course needs to be judged against its stated aims. But employers, professional associations and governments all are important stakeholders too. Further, leading universities in the region see the need to benchmark their standards against the best international norms. In his plenary address, the Vice Chancellor of the National University of Singapore stressed the importance of international standards. He stated:

As academic standards know no national boundaries in this age of instant and global communication, institutions will now be judged by the highest expectations. Self-assessments and external assessments will increasingly take on an international scale, and the sooner an institution acquires a global perspective and embraces the needed changes, the firmer will be its footing in terms of quality assurance.
While the primary focus of quality assurance is usually on the standing and worth of courses and degrees, ideally other elements should be assessed too, especially teaching and learning strategies and achievements; research and research training management procedures; and student support services. In his presentation, Sir Brian Fender argued that we also should include the links between university and business partners.

In defining academic standards and quality assurance agendas and objectives, it is important that a major role should be given to the public and the wider community. Carole Webb explained that in the UK over the past decade a central theme has been the development of quality assurance arrangements in which the public can have confidence. Public confidence embraces a range of important groups and demands.

**Quality Assurance Mechanisms and Methodologies**

Understandably, the conference spent considerable time on quality assurance mechanisms and methodologies. Here we benefited from detailed information about what particular countries within the Asia-Pacific region are doing and about the experience of their specialist agencies, such as the Indian National Assessment and Accreditation Council, the Japanese National Institution for Academic Degrees, the Korean Committee for University Accreditation, the Institute for Assessing the Quality of Degrees and Postgraduate Degrees in China, the Commission for Higher Education of the Philippines, and the Academic Audit Unit of New Zealand.

We also benefited in learning about UK and European experience. The UK has been an important innovator and its system of quality assurance continues to evolve and further develop. This draws emphasis to the desirability for flexibility in quality assurance systems and the need for capacity to adapt over time, as higher education systems themselves evolve. Quality assurance arrangements that are rigid and inflexible are likely to become ineffective.

Internationally, quality assurance depends on a relatively small number of key methodologies – self reviews or self studies; peer review by experts, usually combined with site visits; detailed documentation generated by the unit or institutions being reviewed; social surveys of students, graduates and employers; and statistical performance data. These are the main bases of both external and internal quality assurance systems.

But whatever the mix of elements that are put together, it is of vital importance that new quality assurance mechanisms are sensitive to local cultural values and how particular higher education systems operate. Mere copying mechanisms from elsewhere without understanding the context and circumstances in which they have emerged has great dangers.

With regard to external quality assurance, the main methods employed are institutional audits and disciplinary or subject reviews. But here there is scope for tremendous variations, such as in the precise briefs given to external reviewers, the length and form of site visits, and the type of written reports prepared and who has access to these. Some external review processes are linked to funding allocations, while in other cases reviews are deliberately separated from funding decisions. In the UK, recently the QAA has proposed integrating subject level and institutional reviews.
Internal mechanisms again vary but the main ones still are reviews of courses and departments, reviews of administrative and support units, student feedback on teaching, and peer review of teaching. In many countries, institutions generally have in place well developed, explicit quality assurance policies and mechanisms. But, of course, within any system how effectively this is done often varies considerably. According to Carole Webb, in the UK quality assurance arrangements differ significantly among different groups of universities:

For some (for example, ex CNAA institutions) procedures which were originally designed in accordance with an external model have been ‘internalised’ and gradually reshaped to engage with external audit/subject review procedures requiring evidence of effective self-evaluation as a demonstration of institutional maturity. For universities that had had relatively little experience of ‘external’ intrusion into their ‘private’ professional domains, the experience of exposing internal decision-making and often ill-defined processes to external peer review has been salutary. In some instances, the mere prospect of such external encounters has been sufficient to prompt self-questioning and prepared ground for more systematic consideration of what is meant by quality and standards in the teaching and learning relationship.

A key issue is to find an acceptable balance between external and internal mechanisms, between the role of government and the role of institutions, between accountability and institutional autonomy.

Effective quality assurance also demands attracting and carrying the support of academic staff and embedding within universities a culture of evaluation. Academic staff need to be convinced of the contribution that well designed quality assurance mechanisms can make and that the additional staff time and effort involved is likely to lead to substantial on-going improvements.

Quality assurance also requires achieving a balance between the burdens placed on institutions against legitimate external information and reporting requirements. Often what is regarded as a ‘light-touch’ approach by governments can easily be viewed as unreasonable intrusion into internal institutional affairs by university staff.

While there is high degree of commonality in the mechanisms in use, recently a number of new additional mechanisms have been introduced in a number of countries. Qualifications frameworks are becoming increasingly important. These specify in some detail entry requirements to particular courses, the length of courses and the required levels of achievement for each award. Usually they also specify progression pathways from one award to another. This is particularly important in the case of progression from technical and further education awards to university awards.

Other new mechanisms include: codes of practice and subject benchmark statements as recently developed by the QAA in the UK; and the Australian use of performance management tools including requirements for universities to produce quality assurance and improvement plans, a course experience questionnaire, a post graduate research experience questionnaire and the Graduate Skills Assessment Scheme.
Performance Indicators and Benchmarking

Two commonly discussed tools of quality assurance are performance indicators and benchmarking. While both have limitations, they can provide considerable help to system as well as institutional managers.

In essence, performance indicators are quantitative measures that attempt to assess the achievements of higher education institutions and systems, and their constituent parts. Performance indicators have great value in pointing to achievements, but they do not attempt to tell the whole story about achievements. Rather, they are merely measures that provide perspectives on aspects of performance, and should be used with other information to make judgements about overall levels of achievement.

As indicated in a number of papers presented at the conference, there is now an extensive international literature on performance indicators. An important distinction can be made between simple indicators, performance indicators and general indicators. Simple indicators are usually expressed in the form of absolute figures and are intended to provide a relatively unbiased description of the situation or process. Performance indicators differ from simple indicators in that they imply a point of reference, for example, a standard, an objective, an assessment, a comparator, and therefore are relative in character rather than being absolute. General indicators are derived from outside an institution and are not indicators in a strict sense, but generally take the form of opinions, survey findings or general statistics. However, all three types of indicators are often referred to as performance indicators. Appropriate and agreed performance indicators help institutions monitor their own performance. They also can help move the public agenda away from single dimension rankings or ratings, such as those published by the magazine Asiaweek.

Particular interest was shown in performance indicators used in Australia by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. These have grown out of work that has been going on for well over a decade. In the early 1990s, the Performance Indicators Research Group commenced trialing a broad range of indicators across the higher education system. Earlier this group had introduced the Course Experience Questionnaire administered to students and later included graduate destinations as a measure of institutional performance. This was followed in 1994 with the release of indicators of diversity and performance including indicators of student pass rates, drop out rates, and completion rates and graduate destinations. In 1996 the number of indicators was extended to 68. Two years later the Department published The Characteristics and Performance of Higher Education Institutions (1998) comprising 360 indicators covering students, staff, finances and outcomes. This publication attempted to meet a frequently made criticism that indicators record more about the characteristics of students rather than institutional performance. It did this by calculating an expected value of the indicator for each institution based on a set of national benchmarks. By comparing the actual value of each indicator with the expected value, it was possible to derive a measure of institutional performance for each indicator.

A number of papers and presentations referred to the ratings published by Asiaweek, pointing to dangers in the simple ranking of institutions or departments. On the other hand, it was pointed out that the rankings of Asiaweek and other publications had usefully challenged higher education managers and teachers to take quality assurance more seriously.
The idea of benchmarking comes from industry. It is a popular tool for self-evaluation and self-improvement, enabling institutions to monitor performance on a range of dimensions, and to compare current performance with past performance and with the performance of other institutions with similar characteristics. In this way, institutions can identify relative strengths and weaknesses, and develop strategies of improvement. Benchmarking can also be used effectively at higher education system level. Both India and Australia have extensive documentation available that was referred to in papers. Other papers mentioned that benchmarking could be used to support the regulation of academic standards and that in a number of countries (such as Thailand and Iran) important work has been carried out in benchmarking for medical education.

In India, the system of benchmarking was developed by in-house experts in the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, with some help from consultants. It was decided to use a five-stage process of: setting the platform; choosing the appropriate benchmarking activity; identifying the aspects to be benchmarked; fixing the norms and indicators; and applying the benchmarks. In the early stages, the emphasis was on measurement per se and on relatively straightforward comparisons. This was followed by a gradual shift in attention towards processes. Today the main emphasis is on best practice. In terms of methodology, considerable help was derived from the work of the Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service (CHEMS) and its benchmarking club.

In his keynote address, Dr Edwards drew attention to the need for clarification of whether any benchmarking effort is restricted to the minimum level of performance, or whether benchmarks aim to identify a range of levels or grades. He emphasised the important distinction between minimum grades and satisfactory performance.

Credit Transfer and Mutual Recognition of Awards

The final theme of the conference program was credit transfer and the mutual recognition of awards. Trust in the quality of awards of other institutions and other countries is essential for increased credit transfer and mutual recognition, while facilitating increased mobility of students and professional labour will depend on enhanced credit transfer and mutual recognition. There needs to be, therefore, a concerted effort not only to foster quality assurance but also to promote its successful outcomes.

Credit transfer and mutual recognition of qualifications are clearly linked. The greater the degree of student mobility and the more that credit is transferred, the greater becomes a university’s understanding of another’s standards. Understanding is one of the major barriers to qualifications recognition.

Useful progress within many countries and regions has been achieved with both credit transfer and mutual recognition of awards, making it easier for students to transfer from one completed award to a higher level award, and transfer from one course and institution to another course and institution, carrying credit for incomplete awards to be used towards another award elsewhere.

Some of the most impressive achievements internationally have been in Europe. While many informal university-to-university credit transfer arrangements have been operating for some
time, systematic credit transfer processes have been operating for just a few years. The first and most widely known scheme is the European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS) which operates within the European ERASMUS student mobility program.

A trial of the ECTS commenced in the early 1990s and involved a small number of institutions and covered five subject areas: medicine, chemistry, history, business studies and mechanical engineering. The pilot was very successful and has since been extended and built in as an element within the SOCRATES-ERASMUS program. Over 200 universities are now using the ECTS.

The ECTS is a way of organising academic recognition based on transparency of study programs and students’ achievements. The ECTS does not regulate the content, structure or equivalence of academic programs. These are issues of quality which must be determined by universities themselves when establishing a satisfactory basis for co-operation agreements.

More recently in Europe another important milestone has been the 1999 Bologna Declaration which aims to coordinate quality frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms across Europe. This Declaration was agreed to by Ministers of Education, or their representatives, from 29 European countries. The ultimate aim is to make a degree awarded anywhere in Europe recognised and accepted by both all academic institutions and employers. The declaration has three complementary themes: creation of a qualifications framework accepted and recognised across Europe; improvement of the competitiveness of European higher Education; and development of a sense of European citizenship.

Within the Asia-Pacific region, there have been important developments since the UNESCO Convention of 1985 but progress has been much slower than many had hoped. The issues are complex and multi-lateral working agreements are difficult to achieve. In her keynote address, Professor Yerbury demonstrated the value of the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) scheme and the UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme (UCTS). She also called for increased government support to enable a much larger number of students to spend a period of study in another country of our region. Achieving increased credit transfer and enhanced mutual recognition of awards across the region is an important cause that deserves wide support, both by governments and higher education institutions.

UMAP was founded in 1991 with the objectives of achieving increased mobility of students and staff within the region and also improved quality of higher education. Based on the European experience, the UMAP countries agreed in 1998 to introduce a similar credit transfer scheme, now known as the UCTS. This was an important initiative, providing universities in Asia-Pacific with a mechanism by which they could translate the value and grades of courses which their students had undertaken when studying on exchange at foreign universities into those which would eventually be awarded by their home university. University participation in the scheme is, of course, based on more than some mathematical evaluation of the content of the course studied by the student. It is also based on a great deal of confidence and trust between the partners. That trust is built out of understandings about quality assurance.

The issue of mutual recognition of qualifications within the region is more difficult and complex. Governments, higher education institutions and international organisations in Asia and the Pacific region have cooperated over the last 20 years to bring about mutual
recognition of higher education qualifications but much remains to be done. The cooperative approach was exemplified in the negotiation and eventual agreement in 1985 on the UNESCO Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific. Soon after its adoption as an UNESCO Convention in 1983 it was ratified by sufficient countries to enable the formation of the Regional Committee. This was a defining moment in regional cooperation in education in Asia and the Pacific.

While regional conventions are important, on their own they cannot achieve mutual recognition of qualifications. They are the result of multilateral negotiations with the inevitable, and necessary, political and practical compromises. They cannot bind individual universities to accept any other universities' qualifications. That task must be done on a bilateral basis by individual universities or national organisations of universities.

Achievements and Challenges Ahead

Clearly in many countries within the region significant progress with quality assurance systems has been made. Most countries have national quality assurance policies and systems in some form in place and these are becoming increasingly embedded at the institutional level. In a number of countries, national agencies have been operating for a decade or more and substantial experience has been gained with different methodologies. In China, for example, in 1995 the Ministry of Education began a program of assessment of teaching in higher education institutions. By the year 2000, the Ministry had assessed 160 institutions, 34 of which had not passed in the first assessment. Korea has had national systems of accreditation since 1982. A trial accreditation system operated from 1982 to 1992 and in 1994 a new form of university accreditation commenced. In India, the University Grants Commission established the National Assessment and Accreditation Council in 1994 and since then the Council has developed a particular model of assessment and accreditation that it has used in some 150 institutional assessments.

Many observers believe that both national and institutional quality assurance have played and continues to play important roles in maintaining academic standards, achieving improvements especially in teaching and learning, and giving employers and the wider public increased confidence in higher education awards and the knowledge and skills gained by students. Certainly there is evidence from a number of countries that institutional attitudes to quality assurance and accreditation have changed dramatically with the introduction of new national systems. In India, for example, in the first three years many institutions were either indifferent or reluctant to participate, but by the second three years institutions had come to see the value of external assessment. A number of papers noted with favourable comment the development of a ‘quality culture’ across higher education systems.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that there has been resistance to change and a number of proposed initiatives were unable to proceed because of lack of sufficient support. It would be helpful if more could be done to monitor the work of quality assurance systems within the region and to evaluate their effects on academic standards and the responsiveness of universities to student and employer demands.

In the UK, possibly more than in any other country, efforts have been made to assess the impact of quality assurance efforts since the late 1980s. In the UK all universities have set up
procedures with an explicit quality assurance purpose. According to Carole Webb, this has made universities question how quality in higher education is defined, measured, secured, and enhanced; how academic standards are set and maintained and communicated to the wider community through the qualifications awarded by them; how quality assurance and accountability for quality and standards can respond to the requirements and expectations of mass higher education; and how to give increased relevance of concepts such as consumer protection and equality of opportunity.

As already noted, while the UK over the past decade has had one of the most rigorous systems of quality assurance, it is in the process of making fundamental change. The new system being introduced will:

1. Continue with subject and institutional wide assessments, but integrate external processes for these more closely;
2. External reviewers appointed by the QAA will take part in internal subject reviews and gather evidence over time to inform the Agency’s judgements about institution wide arrangements for quality and standards;
3. Over a six year cycle, the QAA will report nationally for each institution on: the outcome standards of all its programs; quality of student learning experiences; and the effectiveness of institution wide management of standards and quality.

There will be no direct financial reward for success to institutions, but institutions with superior results will be rewarded by ‘lighter touch’ reviews in future while poor reports will result in increased supervision by the QAA. A national framework for quality assurance is being introduced and the QAA intends that this will serve as a common reference point for all universities and colleges. This framework includes: a code of practice (with system-wide expectations on all matters related to quality and standards); subject benchmark statements for 41 subjects; and a national qualifications framework which will accurately map the standards expected at each qualification level, and identify progression routes between different qualifications.

While there has been considerable progress within the Asia-Pacific region, at the same time resistance to change has blocked a number of efforts. For example, in Iran a 1990 proposal to assess activities in universities and rank them according to national criteria was successfully opposed by university rectors. Concern about this proposal was particularly strong among rectors from new universities.

Dr Woodhouse and other speaker pointed to new challenges ahead with the further expansion of transnational higher education, and of on-line education and virtual universities. Other challenges will come from further academic business collaboration, especially with the possibilities of links between groups of universities and major media corporations. How will quality assurance be handled with these new developments and who will check the work of the national quality assurance agencies? Perhaps in the future, as Dr Woodhouse suggested, quality assurance agencies may become less direct checkers of quality and more orchestrators, gatherers and authenticators of evidence.

But whatever this longer term future is, in the short term we can be sure that the quality assurance mechanisms being put in place will be judged by their contribution to the
improvement of higher education, by the increased levels of confidence they provide to stakeholders, and by their value in achieving enhanced human resource development.

References


VI. ANNEX
Overview of Quality Assurance Practice

Brian Fender
HEFCE
Bangkok, 8th November 2000
## UK Populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>48.1 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>2.9 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>5.1 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>1.6 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>57.7 m</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UK Universities and colleges

89 Universities but London and Wales are federal universities with 14 and 6 colleges respectively.

British universities are not large, most fall in the range 4000 to 20000; 40% have between 8000-12000 full-time students.

There are also higher education colleges which are generally smaller; they include specialist colleges e.g. education and music.
## Sources of finance for universities and colleges, 1998-99

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount (£M)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total income</strong></td>
<td>£9,915</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA fees*</td>
<td>£588</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEFCE, TTA &amp; FEFC funding</td>
<td>£3,950</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research grants &amp; contracts</td>
<td>£466</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate fees</td>
<td>£81</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>£372</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-research</td>
<td>£879</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other research income</td>
<td>£11</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK charities</td>
<td>£56</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas student fees</td>
<td>£53</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residences and catering</td>
<td>£705</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other income</td>
<td>£1,746</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Many students contribute directly towards their tuition fees.*

Source: HESA finance record 1998-99 English HEIs
Common assumptions about the future of UK Higher Education

- Continued expansion
- Focus on individual student needs
- Growth of quality assurance systems
- Profound role of C & IT
- Greater competition between institutions
- Importance of global and regional dynamics
- Increased professionalism of research
- Stronger links with industry and the community
University Activities
Responding to needs

Research

Teaching and learning

Governance/Management

Business and the Community
The Future of HE
A radical agenda

- Widening Participation
- Innovation; the e-University
- Business and the Community
- Research
- Collaboration and restructuring
- Human Resource development
- Diversity
- Accountability
Why do we need quality assurance in universities?

- To enhance performance
- To provide information on standards
- To eliminate poor/unsatisfactory provision
- To provide a basis for funding or investment
- To give accountability
Stakeholders in HE

- Employers
- Professional Bodies
- Business & Community
- Staff
- Funders Sponsors
- Regulators
- Students
- FE and Schools
- Political/financial
- HEs
Key tensions in accountability

Autonomy ------------<-------------- Accountability

Self-assessment ----<------------- External Review

Commitment ------<------------- Compliance
Effective accountability = Good communication

Well-framed protocols are necessary to describe:

- Stakeholders mission, strategy and goals
- Relationships and objectives between stakeholder and HE universities and colleges
- Service requirements and expectations from institutions
- Accountability parameters and methods
- Relationship management and support
Better accountability through an investor partner model

Stakeholders and institutions all seek more positive accountability relationships:

- stakeholders seek policy outcomes delivered through capable HEIs
- institutions seek stable and coherent funding to develop strategic priorities
- all want system to encourage innovation and diversity in response to changing world

INVESTORS:
- define values & outcomes sought
- Invest where these are best offered
- assure confidence in management
- do not dictate processes

PARTNERS:
- agree objectives for funding
- share responsibility for delivery
- share risks and liabilities
- commit to long term relationships

COMPETITORS:
- differentiate their positions
- respond to customer needs
- invest in strategic strengths
- collaborate where appropriate

INVESTOR / PARTNER EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH STRATEGIC FUNDING RELATIONSHIPS
Why do we need quality assurance in universities?

- To enhance performance
- To provide information on standards
- To eliminate poor/unsatisfactory provision
- To provide a basis for funding or investment
- To give accountability
Tools of Quality Assurance

Open flow of information essential

Audit of processes

Assessment of outcomes → Incentives for improvement

Benchmarking

Setting standards

Identification of good practice
Quality assurance in practice in the UK

- Research
  - Research Assessment Exercise began in 1986
- Teaching and Learning
  - Higher Education Quality Council (audit); Teaching Quality Assessment (1993) (subject assessments); combined as Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in 1997
- Business & Community (England)
  - Evaluation by HEFCE/Department of Trade and Industry after 2001
- Governance and Management
  - Financial Audit since 1960’s; governance issues 1990’s
Research
Current HEFCE Goals

- To provide an optimum research environment through competitive selective funding
- To encourage world class centres of research
- To enable institutions to support project research (dual support)
- To support emerging areas of research and research strengths
- To take account, to an appropriate extent, of national needs and strengths (currently silent)
- To fund fairly
## Sources of Research Funding
(England) £m

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>1995/6</th>
<th>1998/9</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Funding Council</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>824</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Councils</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>466++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK charities</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK govt/health</td>
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<td>247</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
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<td>183</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
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<td>124</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overseas</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

++ National/ International Facilities; Arts & Humanities Res. Bd.
The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)

• Peer Review
  – about 10 reviewers per panel; the Funding Council selects but nominations widely sought; 68 Units of assessments (subjects)
• Quality of individual publications emphasised
• All subjects assessed on a common 7 point scale (1, 2, 3b, 3a, 4, 5 and 5*)
  – succeeded (above average, average, below average)
• Results used directly in funding and account for approximately 96% of HEFCE funding
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RAE rating (standard)</th>
<th>Value for Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5* International level</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>3a</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1 Local interest only</td>
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Some criticisms (and myths!) of the RAE

- Encourages short termism e.g. by premature publication
- Discourages interdisciplinary research
- Reinforces research orthodoxy
- Discourages applied research
- Devalues teaching and other learned activities
- Promotes ‘poaching’ of staff; discourages hiring of young staff
Improvements to the RAE for 2001

Widespread consultation lead to:

- More user representation; all forms of research output can be submitted
- Wider review of inter-disciplinary research
- International review of 5/5* research gradings
- Sub-panels in medicine
- Higher representation of women on panels
- Better arrangements for dealing with staff transferring between institutions
Further improvements envisaged after 2001

• Greater flexibility in setting criteria between disciplines

**Importance of the people output**

• More rigorous assessment of post-graduate research training to ensure standards are met
  – Standards set by extensive discussion between universities, funding bodies, employer organisations; professional bodies

• Similar assessment of staff development arrangements for contact researchers and young researchers

• Particular attention to equal opportunities
Quality assurance in teaching and learning: current position

- Responsibility of each university
- Assumption of comparability of standards; use of external examiners
- Accreditation at the course level by professional bodies
- External QAA peer review
  - audit at the institutional level with assessment at subject level; visits in standard format
- Publication of review results
  - subject reviews on a 4 point scale applied to 6 areas
- Performance indicators
**Quality assurance in teaching and learning: performance indicators**

Key performance indicators:

- **completion rates**
  - research intensive university: 90 (projected), 89 (benchmark)
  - new university: 75 (projected), 81 (benchmark)
  - college: 88 (projected), 81 (benchmark)

- **widening participation**
  - % ‘poor’ areas
    - research intensive university: 5 (projected), 8 (benchmark)
    - new university: 19 (projected), 15 (benchmark)
    - college: 10 (projected), 16 (benchmark)
Quality assurance in teaching and learning: future changes

• Codify expectations on standards - benchmarks and qualifications framework
• Draw on university’s own procedures
• Vary intensity of scrutiny depending on concerns
• Integrate subject level and institution level reviews
  – Report on unsatisfactory provision; provision that needs significant improvement and good practice
Quality assurance in teaching and learning: issues for discussion

- Identifying risk (remember the focus on the individual learner)
- Maintaining comparability of standards
- Providing accessible information for students and the public
- Promoting improvements in quality
- Clarity of expectations versus innovation and flexibility e.g. e-learning
- Achieving rigour without imposing excessive burdens
Quality assurance in working with business & community: goals

- HE/business (& community) interaction and understanding improved
- Better organisational arrangements and infrastructure within HE in order to be better able to interact with and respond to business
- Improved access and use by business of HE’s graduates, products, resources and services
- The promotion of knowledge and technology transfer between HE and business
Quality assurance in working with business & community: the process

- Identify activities
- Measurable quantities - emphasis on outputs
  - licensing income; training course income; research income from industry; number of spin out companies and volume of business; flow of people engaged in knowledge transfer etc.
- Impact
  - sophistication of knowledge transfer; type of partnership; international - local effects
- Assessment
  - peer review by whom; standards; self assessment
- Consultation throughout!
University - Industry links; current activities in knowledge transfer

- Contract research
- Technology transfer
- IPR patenting and licensing
- Science Park support/incubator units
- University companies/spin out companies
- Tailored educational courses/programmes
- Training courses
- Consultancy
Possible hierarchy of business research based links

Partnerships for long-term research
Repeat contract research
Medium term research contract
Short term research contract
Consultancy (own hierarchy)
Provision of sophisticated technical services
Provision of simple technical services
Quality assurance in Governance and Management

- Responsibility of each university
  - the autonomous university; financial memorandum
- Audit by Funding Councils
  - every three years; looks at the university’s internal and external financial audit; risk management governance arrangements - oversight of strategy, review of performance, selection of governors etc
- Development of good practice (in partnership)
  - commissioned studies e.g to improve value for money; codes of practice; national task groups; funding for the development of good practice
Quality assurance in Governance and Management e.g. human resource management needs

**Encouraged by extra funding**

- Regular reviews of staffing requirements - institutional size and shape
- annual individual performance reviews - appropriate rewards
- action to tackle poor performance
- measures to address recruitment and retention difficulties - recognition of market pressures
- equal opportunities programmes and targets
- staff development - to meet the 2000+ agenda