

## APQN’s Thirteen Innovative Actions of Quality Assurance during the COVID Pandemic

At the end of 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic (hereinafter referred to as “the Pandemic”) broke out unexpectedly. The Pandemic disrupted education all over the world; school closures affected more than 1.6 billion learners<sup>1</sup>. The Asia-Pacific region was one of the most disrupted regions. Approximately 1.2 billion students across the region lost about 1.1 trillion hours of in-person learning experience as a result of school closures<sup>2</sup>. As a result of this unexpected situation, the way of education changed dramatically from face-to-face to screen-to-screen teaching and learning.

One of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. This has been affected by the Pandemic. At such a time of need, education innovation serves as a powerful engine for **learning recovery**.

In March, 2020, the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (hereinafter referred to as “APQN”) lost no time in response to a global crisis in education. During the past three years (2020-2022), APQN made thirteen innovative moves of quality assurance (hereinafter referred to as “QA”) to accelerate learning recovery. Below is the summary of APQN thirteen innovative actions.

### I. Relevance of APQN Innovation

The Pandemic challenge brings the opportunity for change. No doubt, higher education has been transformed by Pandemic, firstly the lockdown, and eventually the recovery. APQN believes education must adapt to new changes as soon as possible and must be aware of this public social crisis. APQN must focus on new changes in the participants, education philosophy, connotation, methods, and teacher-student relationships. APQN must lead a speedy recovery for learning and teaching.<sup>3</sup> This is APQN’s mission during the Pandemic era.

The sudden closure of campuses at the beginning of 2020 changed the traditional method of “face-to-face teaching” to “screen-to-screen teaching” which is ineffective. The New UNESCO global survey revealed the impact of the Pandemic on higher education and includes “disruption of teaching and learning” “poor quality of online teaching and learning” and other aspects.<sup>4</sup> APQN’s global survey showed that 15% of the respondents considered online teaching as ineffective and 53% considered the quality as poor.<sup>5</sup>

## II. Beneficiaries and Impacts of APQN’s thirteen Innovative Actions

**1. Beneficiary countries.** The Asia-Pacific Region covered by APQN includes all Pacific Island nations and territories, New Zealand, Australia, Papua New Guinea; all island and mainland countries and territories of Asia, including Russia, Afghanistan, the other central Asian countries and Iran, but excluding the Gulf countries (which are covered by another network).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, UNICEF, and World Bank. 2021. *The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery*. p.5. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/the-state-of-the-global-education-crisis-a-path-to-recovery>.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO. 2022. *Learning recovery and addressing the learning crisis in the Asia Pacific: policy brief*. p.1. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381978>.

<sup>3</sup> APQN (2020). *Project Proposal of APQN Survey of the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)*, p.1. Proposal endorsed by APQN Board on March 15, 2020 ( Code : APQN 2020-01).

<sup>4</sup> Andreas Schleiche.(2020). *The impact of COVID-19 on education insights from education at a glance 2020*, published by OECD, <https://www.oecd.org/education/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-insights-education-at-a-glance-2020.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Zhang Jianxin1, Yang Yahan (2020). *APQN Survey: The COVID-19 Impact on Higher Education Institutions*, Academic journal of Research on Shanghai Education Evaluation, No. 5, p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> APQN(2004). *Defining Our Region*, APQN website, <https://www.apqn.org/members/defining-our-region>

APQN has two hundred and sixty-eight (268) members from forty-seven (47) countries/territories<sup>7</sup>. All APQN innovative actions covered the whole region.

**2. Beneficiaries include six cohorts from the Asia Pacific region and the world.** The beneficiaries include (1) tens of thousands of students from the 47 countries and regions in the Asia Pacific region and around the world; (2) thousands of education leaders and administrators from the 47 countries and regions; (3) thousands of teachers and educators from the 47 countries and regions; (4) hundreds of researchers and evaluators focusing on the global online teaching quality assurance; (5) more than 100 external quality assurance agencies from the Asia Pacific region and Europe; (6) APQN’s 268 institutional members in 47 countries/territories in the Asia-Pacific region.

**3. Effectiveness.** APQN has published a number of research reports and papers, and as a milestone, it developed "APQN Online Teaching Quality Assurance Standard" which was released globally on May 30, 2021 ([https://www.apqn.org/images/projects/JX\\_APQN\\_Standard\\_for\\_Online-Teaching\\_Quality\\_Assurance2021-5-31.pdf](https://www.apqn.org/images/projects/JX_APQN_Standard_for_Online-Teaching_Quality_Assurance2021-5-31.pdf)). APQN also developed a dozen of free resources including two books to be shared with university leaders, administrators, educators, researchers, teachers and students who are interested in online teaching quality. One is “APQN Research on the COVID-19 Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education Quality” ([https://www.apqn.org/images/projects/APQN\\_Research\\_on\\_COVID\\_Impact\\_2021-6-25.pdf](https://www.apqn.org/images/projects/APQN_Research_on_COVID_Impact_2021-6-25.pdf)), and the other is “COVID Response Mechanism and Impact on Quality Assurance for Higher Education in the Asia-Pacific Region” ([https://www.apqn.org/images/contents/library/AAC%20Proceedings/APQN\\_Anthology\\_of\\_2021\\_AAC.pdf](https://www.apqn.org/images/contents/library/AAC%20Proceedings/APQN_Anthology_of_2021_AAC.pdf)).

### III. Originality of APQN’s Thirteen Innovative Actions

**1. APQN’s initial action.** In March 2022, at the beginning of the Pandemic, APQN carried out the global survey to understand the status and responses of universities, teachers and students, in order to explore the effectiveness of unconventional measures and a series of measures taken by universities in the face of crisis and conflict. One of the results shows that 64.45% of the respondents considered the Pandemic greatly impacted the internationalization of higher education. This pandemic not only reminds of the importance of online education, but also shows the importance of international cooperation, international exchange and international education.<sup>8</sup>

#### 2. APQN actions’ overview

Under the severe situation of Pandemic, APQN innovative activities include **six series**:(1) four global surveys; (2) one in-depth interviews to Board Directors; (3) three international conferences and one online forum; (4) one APQN online teaching standards design; (5) one qualitative research; and (6) two books (Table 1).

**Table 1: List of APQN’s Thirteen Innovative Actions of Quality Assurance during the COVID Pandemic**

#	Time	Innovative actions
1	March-May, 2020	APQN global survey on the COVID impact in higher education institutions
2	April-June, 2020	APQN survey on the COVID impact on quality assurance agencies
3	June-July, 2020	Interviews with APQN Board Directors on COVID impact on HE quality
4	July 28, 2020	APQN online forum "Influence of COVID on higher education quality assurance: the new normal of higher education 4.0
5	July, 2020	Survey on effectiveness of online teaching during COVID pandemic
6	Nov.25-26, 2020	MPI-APQN 12 <sup>th</sup> international conference on teaching and learning quality assurance in higher

<sup>7</sup> Jianxin Zhang (2022). APQN President Report in 2022. APQNNews (Issue 26), December 30, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Jianxin Zhang, Yahan Yang (2020). *Final Report of APQN Survey Research on the COVID-19 Impact in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)*, June 23, 2020: p.33. [https://www.apqn.org/media/library/project\\_reports/1--Final-Report-on-APQN-Survey-on-COVID-19-Impact-in-HEIs-2020-7-16.pdf](https://www.apqn.org/media/library/project_reports/1--Final-Report-on-APQN-Survey-on-COVID-19-Impact-in-HEIs-2020-7-16.pdf)

		education under the pandemic
7	June to December, 2020	Qualitative research on effectiveness of online course during the COVID pandemic
8	May 31, 2021	APQN Standard for Online-Teaching Quality Assurance
9	Nov. 22, 2021	MPI-APQN 13 <sup>th</sup> international conference on education innovation and teaching quality assurance in the post-pandemic era
10	Nov. 25, 2021	APQN Academic conference on COVID response mechanism and impact on quality assurance for higher education in the Asia-Pacific Region
11	June, 2022	Anthology of selected papers of 2021 AAC in Singapore under COVID Pandemic
12	June, 2022	APQN Research on the COVID Impact on the HE Quality
13	Nov., 2022	APQN academic conference “quality assurance for higher education under COVID pandemic & beyond in Asia-Pacific Region”

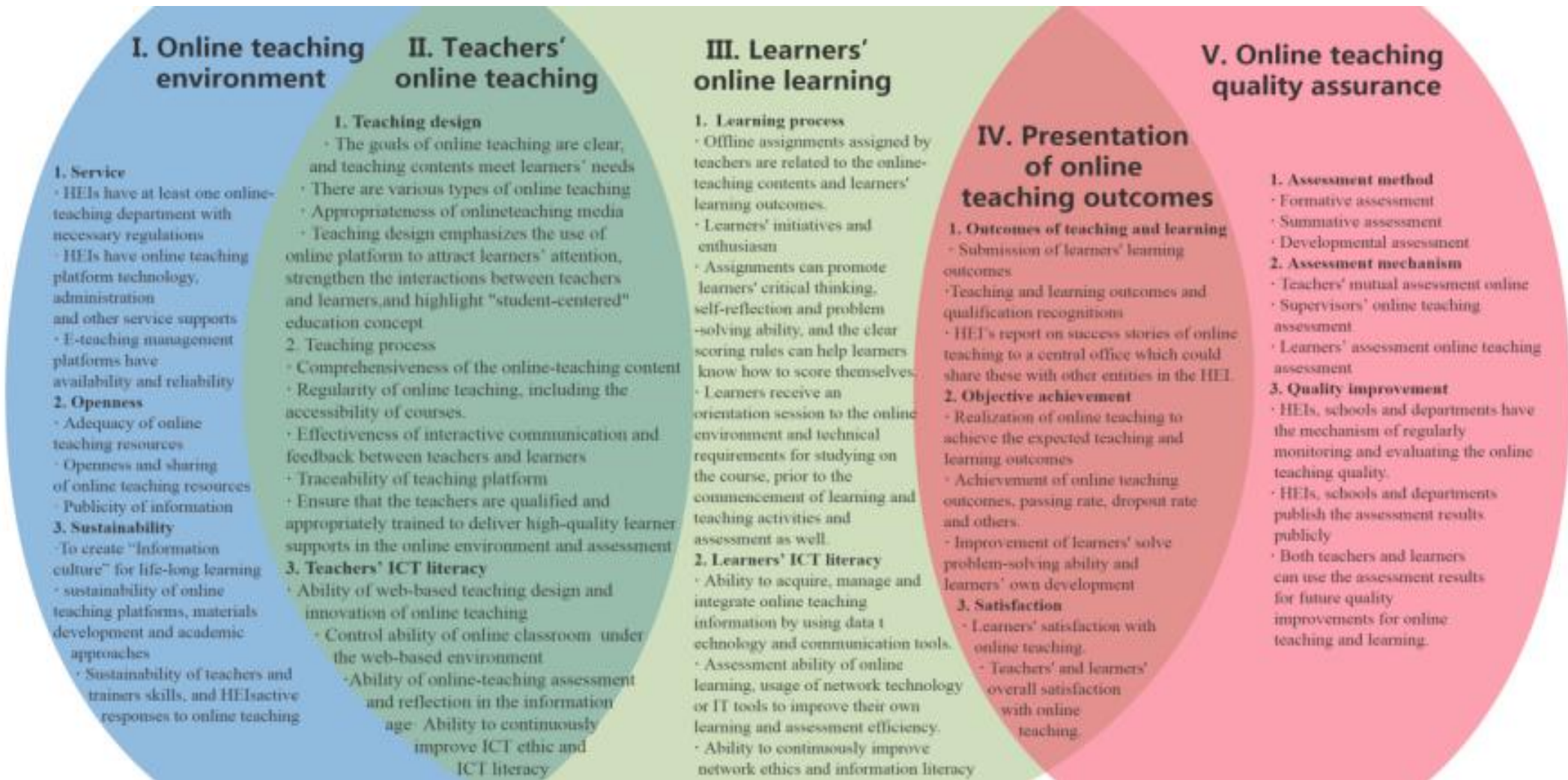
3. **APQN’s Method.** APQN innovation activities are based on a method of "**finding problems - analyzing problems - solving problems**". As for “**finding problems**”, a series of timely surveys were conducted targeting the following: (1) key objects of internal quality assurance institutions such as global university leaders, administrators, teachers and students from 47 countries and regions; (2) 101 external quality assurance agencies in Europe and in the Asia Pacific region; (3) the quality of online teaching for teachers and students; (4) quality assurance experts by Delphi Expert survey, determining the indicators of online teaching quality standards. As for “**analyzing problems**”, APQN carried out five international conferences, in-depth interviews and SPSS analysis. As for “**solving problem**”, APQN used the Delphi expert analysis method to develop "*APQN Online Teaching Quality Assurance Standard*". It also proposed a set of response mechanisms, which are appropriate for universities during the crisis and in the future.

#### IV. Sustainability of APQN’s thirteen Innovative Actions

“*APQN Standard for Online-Teaching Quality Assurance*” (Figure 1) is the first standard developed with a global view focusing only on online teaching and learning. “*APQN Standard*” consist of 5 criteria, 14 indicators and 46 observation points. The 5 criteria are: 1) online teaching environment; 2) teachers’ online teaching; 3) learners’ online learning; 4) presentation of online teaching outcomes; and 5) online- teaching quality assurance.

APQN innovative actions can be scaled up with ease. All of APQN’s work are available on APQN’s website free of charge and can be replicated by educational institutions, stakeholders and other interested parties. In addition, APQN Consultant Data provide the contact information of 234 consultants.

**Figure 1:** The framework of “APQN Standard for Online-Teaching Quality Assurance”



## **Conclusion**

Globally and especially in the Asia-Pacific region, various innovative education policies and practices have emerged and accelerated learning recovery. APQN has had the fortune to take the first dip to develop a constructive framework. APQN hopes its initiatives would help build a stable platform for communication among fellow agencies, scholars, and educational institutions, and that one day “*APQN Standard*” or other quality standards on online quality assurance standard will be carried out and benefit all the students, teachers, university administrators and others in the Asia-Pacific Region.