Policies and actions of accreditation and quality assurance bodies to counter corruption in higher education

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The Study 2017-18

• Aim to capture evidence of how accreditation and quality assurance bodies (AQABs) globally are responding to corruption in higher education
• Building on 2016 report by IIEP & CIQG
• Funded by CIQG
• Literature review
• Survey of AQABs by on-line questionnaire and interviews
• Report will be published by CIQG shortly
Scope

Exploring AQAB responses to corruption in higher education concerning:

• the regulatory process
• the teaching role
• student admission and recruitment
• student assessment
• credentials and qualifications
• research and publications
Baselines

Most examples of corruption in this study focus on intentional actions of individuals or groups rather than misconduct through accident, incompetence or ignorance.

Can we be sure everyone agrees what is meant by quality and how to assure quality and standards in higher education?

AQABs cover a range of different purposes and missions.
Responses - questionnaire

307 invitations sent using CIQG mailing lists – very grateful for responses from 70 participants, leading to 69 valid responses

Main purpose of the AQAB - select one

- A. Educational Standards and Quality: 25 responses
- B. Approval / Authorization of Educational Programs / Courses: 7 responses
- C. Accreditation of Subject-Specific Programs / Professional Programmes / Courses: 19 responses
- D. Accreditation of Professional Programs / Courses: 13 responses
Responses - questionnaire

307 invitations - 69 valid responses

Levels of AQAB operation - select all that apply

- PRE OR SUB BACHELOR: 33
- BACHELOR DEGREE: 53
- MASTER DEGREE: 55
- DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES: 43
- RESEARCH: 15
# Questionnaire: Geographical coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Invitations</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Coverage *</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Africa</strong></td>
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<td><strong>North America</strong></td>
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<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
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</table>

* reflects AQABs covering more than one region

AQAB operations: 23 Internationally, 50 Nationally, 19 Locally / Regionally
How interested is your organization in these categories?
Interviews

Very grateful to 22 interview participants (7 from AQABs, remainder people with interest in corruption in HE), who were invited to:

• enhance the available evidence about specific categories of corruption;
• add to evidence about a specific geographical region;
• provide additional viewpoints about causes of corruption and possible ways forward;
• explore interesting approaches and good practice examples.
Literature review

• Annotated bibliography over 1000 rows
• Examples of actions by AQABs
• Examples of corruption in higher education
• Majority of sources are press and media reports, videos, podcasts etc
• “Grey literature”
• Empirical research
Findings

• Corruption in HE occurs in every part of the world, but types and prevalence vary
• AQABs in some countries more aware / alert / pro-active about corruption than AQABs in other countries (eg Albania V Norway)
• Most AQABs have a range of sanctions to respond to corruption found in institutions, however ...
• ... AQABs unlikely to uncover such evidence due to methods used to audit / evaluate institutions
• Nine overlapping themes emerged from analysis
Responses about corruption in the regulation of higher education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response to Corruption</th>
<th>A. Bribery to Influence Decisions</th>
<th>B. Ignoring Conflicts of Interest</th>
<th>C. Unfair Practices in Appointment of Officials (e.g., through nepotism or favour)</th>
<th>D. Political or Commercial Interference in Regulatory Decisions</th>
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<td>no concerns</td>
<td>it is under control</td>
<td>minor concerns</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- A. Bribery to Influence Decisions
- B. Ignoring Conflicts of Interest
- C. Unfair Practices in Appointment of Officials (e.g., through nepotism or favour)
- D. Political or Commercial Interference in Regulatory Decisions
Responses about corruption in the regulation of higher education

- 64% of questionnaire respondents expressed no concerns about corruption in the HE regulatory process;
- Some AQABs are identifying threats and pro-actively monitoring and supporting HE providers (eg in many Anglophone countries);
- Some countries have insufficient capacity to effectively regulate HE providers, eg in India > 60% of HEIs have no oversight or QA;
- Suggestions for actions to support AQABs:
  - Increase transparency, particularly in panel appointments, operations
  - Reduce bureaucracy
  - Conduct random, unannounced visits
  - More regulation of private providers
  - Independent body to handle complaints
  - Ensure AQABs are independent from governmental influences
Corruption in the governance of higher education institutions

- Political interference in HE / institutional governance reported recently in a number of countries (eg Australia, Brazil, Hungary, Germany, Poland, Russia, Turkey and USA)
- University leaders and professors appointed, promoted using fake or undeserved academic qualifications – impacts on institutional integrity, HE sector and next generation (eg Russia, parts of Africa, Balkans, Pakistan, China, Romania)
- Financial mismanagement of HEIs, procurement, ignoring conflicts of interest (eg Russia, India, UK)
- In-breeding, nepotism: HE providers favoring appointing their own graduates (eg Balkans, Russia) can perpetuate poor practices

Suggestions for AQABs:
- Proactively pursue any allegations
- Highlight the need for action to those responsible
- Apply sanctions to institutions if available
- Encourage diversity, transparency, accountability
Perceptions of integrity, quality and standards within higher education

• No global standards for HE nor is there consistency in how standards are applied in practice (eg Bologna Declaration 1999)

• Some countries lack national standards for HE - impossible to compare HE qualifications nationally and internationally, eg India, Germany

• AQABs accused of uncritically accrediting international providers – “no value added” (North American AQABs)

• Suggestions for AQABs:
  – Be open about differences (+ & -) in standards, culture
  – Focus on quality enhancement rather than check-lists
  – Encourage dialogue about addressing corruption
  – Promote adoption of existing international standards
## Correlation in the teaching role

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Teaching Role in Higher Education</th>
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<th>Minor Concerns</th>
<th>Serious Concerns</th>
<th>Major Problem</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Recruiting/Promoting Academic and...</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Absent Instructors who do not fulfil...</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>C. Harassment of Staff</td>
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<td>D. Harassment of Students</td>
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<td>E. Altering Student Marks in Return for...</td>
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<td>F. Administrative Pressure on Academics to...</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Corruption in the teaching role

- Only 18/69 questionnaire respondents expressed any concern about corruption in HE teaching
- Corruption in teaching role can be driven by various pressures, e.g., financial (institution or personal), student retention & attainment stats, job insecurity & casualization, league tables, publish or perish, workloads (e.g., India, Kosovo, Lithuania)
- Bullying, sexual harassment featured in questionnaire responses and many times in literature, e.g., sexual favours for higher grades
- Suggestions for AQABs:
  - Difficult to identify such problems from self-assessments or visits, but
  - Could provide guidance notes on institutional policy development (TEQSA, Australia) - Encourage institutions to have appropriate reporting methods and much more
  - Encourage open dialogue on this subject
  - Protect whistle-blowers
## Corruption in admissions & recruitment

### A. Exceeding enrolment limits set by governments and regulatory bodies.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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### B. Misleading advertising for recruitment.

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</table>

### C. Bribery of admissions staff or recruitment agents.

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<th>it is under control</th>
<th>minor concerns</th>
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### D. Falsified transcripts and/or fake recommendation letters.

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### E. Cheating in admissions tests.

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<tr>
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<th>no concerns</th>
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<th>minor concerns</th>
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</table>
Corruption in admissions & recruitment

• Only 24/69 questionnaire respondents expressed any concerns about this topic
• Favouritism in admissions by officials (Japan, Slovakia)
• Investigative journalism exposed systematic fraud in admissions by agents in Australia, Canada, UK and USA
• China and Russia have each introduced a centrally controlled university entrance exam;
• Help to verify applicant qualifications (e.g., ENIC-NARIC)
• Suggestions for AQABs:
  – Pro-active sector-wide campaign to highlight fraudulent practices and encourage good practice
  – Use of white lists of accredited providers
Corruption in student assessment

**STUDENT ASSESSMENT**

A. Availability of leaked exam papers or exam-related material
- 7 not applicable
- 12 no concerns
- 8 it is under control
- 8 minor concerns
- 4 serious concerns
- 2 major problem

B. Contract cheating / use of essay mills / ghost writing of assignments
- 8 not applicable
- 8 no concerns
- 6 it is under control
- 8 minor concerns
- 8 serious concerns
- 3 major problem

C. The proliferation of contract cheating companies
- 11 not applicable
- 10 no concerns
- 4 it is under control
- 7 minor concerns
- 6 serious concerns
- 2 major problem

D. Bribery of invigilators/proctors and markers
- 10 not applicable
- 19 no concerns
- 5 it is under control
- 6 minor concerns
- 10 serious concerns

E. Impersonation of candidates in examinations
- 8 not applicable
- 11 no concerns
- 7 it is under control
- 9 minor concerns
- 4 serious concerns
- 2 major problem

F. Plagiarism and cheating in continuous assessment, assignments
- 5 not applicable
- 7 no concerns
- 4 it is under control
- 14 minor concerns
- 6 serious concerns
- 5 major problem

G. Cheating in formal examinations
- 5 not applicable
- 8 no concerns
- 6 it is under control
- 14 minor concerns
- 6 serious concerns
- 2 major problem

H. Inconsistencies and favouritism in grading
- 8 not applicable
- 10 no concerns
- 8 it is under control
- 9 minor concerns
- 4 serious concerns
- 2 major problem
Corruption in student assessment

- 25/69 questionnaire respondents expressed concerns about corruption in student assessment, with only 19/69 registering concerns about essay mills / contract cheating
- Where student cheating is seen as “culturally acceptable” – how to break this cycle?
- Software available to address some forms of student cheating (eg Turnitin)
- Contract cheating is a massive global industry – we know many students are buying assessments, whether or not this is identified;
- Contract cheating companies have been found that blackmail student customers
- It is difficult to quantify how much corruption by students is ignored or not identified by lecturers, examiners, proctors etc.
- Lecturers complicit in student cheating in return for favours
- Some AQABs already addressing such threats: QAA, TEQSA, QQI, New Zealand, 17 USA states - through provision of guidance and legislation
- Suggestions to AQABs
  - Stay abreast of threats to security of assessment - they rapidly evolve
  - Network to share ideas and intelligence
## Corruption in credentials and qualifications

### A. Use of Degree Mills and Accreditation Mills

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<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>No Concerns</th>
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<th>Minor Concerns</th>
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### B. Falsification of Transcripts and Degree Certificates.

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### C. False Statements About Qualifications on CVs and Job Applications.

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<th>Under Control</th>
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### D. Political Pressures on HEIs to Award Academic Degrees to Public Figures.

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<th>No Concerns</th>
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### E. Political Pressures on HEIs to Award Honorary Degrees to Public Figures.

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Corruption in credentials and qualifications

- 23/69 respondents expressed concerns about accreditation and degree mills, slightly fewer had concerns about fake certificates and false statements in job applications
- The Groningen Declaration Network (GDN) facilitates global sharing between organizations offering a digital verification service for academic qualifications (Daniel 2018)
- Much evidence of plagiarized doctoral theses leading to awards by prestigious universities (e.g., in Russia and Germany) – would not be identified as fake by GDN
- Suggestions for AQABs:
  - Support or develop a digital verification service and GDN
  - Publicise such services and encourage or mandate use
  - Follow up on evidence presented on credential fraud
  - Work with whistle-blowers and anti-corruption organizations
Corruption in research and academic publishing

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<th>Category</th>
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<td><strong>A. Presentation of manuscripts translated from other languages as original work.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>B. Publication by supervisors of research by graduate students without acknowledgement.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>C. Suppression of rival work by journal reviewers.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>D. Fabrication of data or results.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>E. Plagiarism in academic publications</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>F. Suppression of inconvenient research results by commercial and other interests</strong></td>
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</table>
Corruption in research and academic publishing

• Only 18/69 questionnaire respondents actively participated in answering this question
• Many AQABs do not include research in their remit – other organizations have oversight
• UK, China and Sweden recently strengthened policies against corruption and unethical practice in academic research
• Peer review has been subject to corruption and scams
• “Predatory” publishing is increasingly problematic
• Suggestions for AQABs:
  – Even if not directly under your remit, corruption in this area is indicative of institutional ethos therefore is still relevant
  – Work with other bodies to encourage good practice.
  – Encourage ethical retraction as a positive action
Networking to counter corruption in higher education

Many examples emerged of AQABs collaborating with other organizations to fight corruption and to foster academic integrity, eg ombudspersons, NGOs, government departments, HE providers, qualifications verification service providers, other AQABs, anti-corruption bodies, international bodies.
How frequently have actions of this type been taken by your organization?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>rarely</th>
<th>occasionally</th>
<th>regularly</th>
<th>frequently</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Highlighting problems in communications or reports</td>
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<td>B. Recommending changes</td>
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<td>C. Demanding changes</td>
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<td>D. Awarding a low accreditation score</td>
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<td>E. Refusing license to operate</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Legend:
- Not applicable
- never
- rarely
- occasionally
- regularly
- frequently
What is being done or planned to address corruption?

- Develop new standards: 25
- Develop new policies: 25
- Develop guidance for higher education providers: 21
- Consult with higher education providers: 21
- Consult with other organizations: 23
- Other: 8
Recommendations to AQABs

- Review terms of reference, standards, negotiate changes and resources to more effectively respond to corruption and malpractice in higher education.
- Make explicit commitment to reducing corruption.
- Be scrupulous about own transparency, accountability and integrity, in every aspect of activities.
- Remain vigilant, be prepared to challenge HE providers about practices that may undermine quality or standards.
- Pro-actively monitor and respond to suspicions of misconduct and corruption across operations and responsibility.
- Take a leadership role in advocating legislation to counter threats from diploma mills and contract cheating companies.
- Undertake research, consult with HE community, including students, to inform and enhance policies and practices for addressing corruption and misconduct in education and research.
- Identify early warning indicators that signal when QA standards in HE and research are compromised by corruption
Conclusions

• Evidence suggests some AQABs lack awareness of threats to quality and standards
• Create opportunities to influence and enhance the effectiveness of policies that impact on different forms of corruption
• Every individual member of HE community globally plays a part in upholding integrity and standards in higher education (government departments, accreditation panelists, institutional leaders, researchers, faculty/academics, clerical officers and students)
Thanks for contributing to the research and for listening

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