

Quality Assurance & Public Accountability

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PURPOSE & ORGANISATION OF STUDY

Purpose of the study

- Initiated by CIQG to provide an overview of how QA bodies are accountable to the public for how they accredit or quality assure effective institutional performance in the form of outcomes for students, often referred to as student success or student outcomes
- Examples of practices of public accountability
- Ideas for future consideration
- Example of template for public reporting

Definition of accountability

The study defines public accountability as:

- The responsibility of QA bodies to provide reliable evidence of the effective performance of accredited or quality assured institutions and programs.
- The central feature of “performance” is what happens to students, i.e. their completion, graduation, jobs and earning rates and, entry to graduate school or successful transfer.
- The information is to be available to all major stakeholders – students, institutions, programs, government, the public and the media.

Higher education as a public good

- Higher education (HE) perceived as a public good has impacted the re-positioning of HE and led to increased demand for greater accountability based on concerns about higher education access/participation, costs/debt, graduate employability/ unemployment and social/economic impact
- There is a growing desire to move beyond assessing quality for improvement to linking quality to relevance and resources
- The level of transparency of accreditation outcomes, positive as well as negative outcomes, has gradually increased and in many parts of the world it has moved beyond reporting on the decision only, i.e. whether accreditation or a QA process had been successful or not, to publication of e.g. full reports, summary reports or action letters

Sources: Hazelkorn & Gibson, 2017, Eaton, 2017, Wilson, 2013 Hazelkorn

Selection of studied QA bodies

- 28 QA bodies across Africa, Austral-Asia, Central and Latin America, Europe, the Middle East and North America
- In operation for a substantial period of time, i.e. no less than one quality assurance cycle
- Informed by academic papers about practices, QA body websites and experts with knowledge of the particular QA bodies

Study methodology

- Desk-based research making use of the websites of the QA bodies involved
- The information used has been found in Standards & Criteria, Accreditation/Review/Audit Handbooks, Team/Reviewer Manuals, Guidelines for institutions, evidence/reporting templates, and Accreditation/Review reports/action letters available in the public domain
- Clarification/follow-up directly with some QA bodies.

STUDY FINDINGS

Pre-dominant performance measures # 1

Performance Measure	Total out of 28
Attrition/Retention	14
Progression	14
Completion	17
Graduation	10
Employment	17
Credit transfer	7

Pre-dominant performance measures # 2

Performance Measure	Total out of 28
Continuation of studies	0
Debt	0
Loan default	5
Earning rates/information	2

Pre-dominant Performance Measures #3

- Some of the studied QA bodies quality assure either institutions or programs and, some work at both program and institutional level.
- Some QA bodies only include performance measures in one of their applied approaches

Assessment of performance #1

- Performance is pre-dominantly assessed in the quality assurance process in the context of an institution's or program's mission and vision, i.e. a fitness for purpose approach
- Some QA bodies require institutions to report on specific measures, data or indicators in a self study and they provide definitions of these measures for institutions to use
- Other QA bodies require institutions to identify and define the performance data/information they consider to be relevant in their particular context and report on these in a self study

Assessment of performance #2

- The majority of the QA bodies require institutions to analyse and monitor their program or institutional performance data and be able to explain how they take action informed by their analysis of the data
- Only one QA body was identified that currently publishes threshold/benchmark statements about the expected institutional performance with respect to student outcomes

Assessment of performance #3

- Holistic consideration by reviewers and recommendations to QA bodies as to whether the institutions or programs meet the QA body's standards, criteria or requirements
- In the cases where QA bodies provide information about institutions' student outcomes to the public, it is provided in accreditation reports or actions letters to institutions.

IDEAS FOR CONSIDERATION

Example of Reporting Template #1

Reporting	Possible content
Generic definition(s) of student success	Present to stakeholders how student success is defined in terms of outcomes in the accreditation/quality assurance processes
Performance measures used to assess student outcomes	Present the specific measures, such as retention, attrition, graduation, used in the review process and how these measures are defined to guide institutions in their self review or internal quality assurance processes and teams in the external review process

Example of Reporting Template #2

Reporting	Possible content
Data/data points/indicator used to assess the student outcomes	Provide examples of the data that institutions are expected to provide as evidence of their student outcomes and how the data are monitored and acted upon by the institutions
Thresholds used, if any, to determine acceptable levels of student success	Include information about the thresholds used by the QA body to determine if the outcomes are satisfactory from an accreditation/quality assurance perspective or whether action is required to improve performance or further explanations are required to understand the reasons for the outcomes

Example of Reporting Template #3

Reporting	Possible content
Actions taken when student outcomes do not meet expectations	Provide information of the actions that institutions that do not meet the thresholds are required to take by the QA body to improve the performance. This could include information about how the performance was eventually improved
Trends in levels of student outcomes consolidated across institutions accredited	Provide analysis of the how student outcomes have developed across all accredited or quality assured institutions over time and what trends have been identified to require particular attention for improvement or what areas have been recorded as particular strengths

Example of Reporting Template #4

Reporting	Possible content
Link to publications of institutional student outcomes	Provide a link on the QA body website that gives stakeholders access to the publications, such as action letters, accreditation reports, decision documents, that include information about institutional student outcomes.

Ideas for future consideration

- Discussion of pros and cons for a higher degree of transparency with respect to expected and/or acceptable levels of student outcomes
- Identification of relevant publicly assessible information about acceptable levels of student outcomes
- Effective approaches for making the information easily accessible to various stakeholders in higher education, e.g. through the use of an information template
- How QA bodies can encourage institutions to improve performance to generate strong student outcomes

CASE STUDIES

Purpose of case studies

- The case studies are intended to provide examples/inspiration and/or be the starting point for considerations and discussions about ways in which transparency of public accountability of QA bodies' assessment of student outcomes can be developed or enhanced.
- The case studies are not intended to provide a full presentation of the chosen QA bodies' quality assurance activities.
- They focus on approaches to public accountability

Case Study QA Bodies

- Introduction
- Performance assessment approach
- Transparency of performance assessment

Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC) #1

Published benchmark rates of student graduation and graduate employment

- ✓ Since 2016 rates derived from an 11-year longitudinal study of the graduation and employment rates reported from 2005 to 2015 in the Annual Reports in order to discern the stability, predictability, and reliability of the rates used in establishing ACCSC's benchmark rates
- ✓ Schools are expected to set goals to exceed both the benchmark rates and the average rates of graduation and employment

ACCSC #2

Established benchmark graduation rates - Examples

Program Length in Months	Average Rates of Graduation	Standard deviation	Established Benchmark Graduation Rates
1-3	92%	8%	84%
16-18	62%	15%	47%

ACCSC #3

- ✓ If results fall below benchmarks requirements institutions are given opportunities to provide additional information but may be subject to heightened monitoring and reporting
- ✓ Actions can be imposed and are summarised and available on the ACCSC website
- ✓ Full Probation and Adverse Action letters, e.g. regarding denial or withdrawal of accreditation, are published on the ACCSC website
- ✓ Under ACCSC's Rules, on a case by case basis, the ACCSC may also elect to publish Warning letters on the website.

Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) #1

Discipline ratings: D-SETARA

- ✓ Purpose was to benchmark disciplines against a set of quality standards for the purpose of improving the quality of teaching and learning at level 6 (undergraduate) of the Malaysian Qualifications Framework in universities and university colleges.
- ✓ The approach was divided into Input-Process-Output domains.
- ✓ Each domain consisted of a set of criteria that were divided into a number of indicators.
- ✓ Each domain had been allocated a weight which differed based on the type of discipline
- ✓ Data were collected from various sources, e.g. Institutional data (through self-assessment, Employer Surveys, Tracer Studies

MQA # 2

- ✓ The 'Outcome' domain included two student performance measures:
 - criteria 1: Graduate Marketability, which was divided into employment rate and average monthly start pay,
 - criteria 5: Student Performance which covered the rate of students completing their students within the stipulated time

- ✓ Six-level rating of the participating higher education institutions:
'Outstanding, Excellent, Very Good, Good, Satisfactory and Weak'

MQA # 3

- ✓ Only the overall rating of an institution was published. The marks achieved for each indicator, and for each criterion and the overall marks of an institution were communicated to the respective institutions only.
- ✓ The overall rating, in terms of the institutional tier rating of the discipline was announced in a press conference and announcements were made in the major newspapers

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) # 1

Risk Assessments that focus on four main areas of risk and 11 indicators.

Four main areas:

- ✓ Provider regulatory history and standing
- ✓ Students (load, experience and outcomes)
- ✓ Academic staff profile
- ✓ Financial viability and sustainability

The 11 Indicators include: attrition rate, including credit transfer, progress rate, completions and graduate destinations

TEQSA # 2

- ✓ A rating is based on specific circumstances of a provider and the calculated quantitative value of the indicator, based on its published technical definition, and with reference to 'risk thresholds'.
- ✓ Risk thresholds are not published
- ✓ The assessment of individual indicators is considered holistically to inform an overall risk evaluation of a provider
- ✓ TEQSA derives a risk rating represented by traffic lights: green, yellow and red

TEQSA #3

- ✓ Assessment shared with providers annually
- ✓ A range of actions are possible
- ✓ Risk indicators are publicly available but not institutional ratings
- ✓ TEQSA makes decisions taking risk, necessity and proportionality into consideration and risk ratings are used to inform regulatory processes that consider whether threshold standards are met

WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) #1

Graduation Rate Dashboard

- ✓ Institutions are required to provide disaggregated data on students' progress toward timely completion of their degrees, and retention and graduation rates for the programs delivered by the institution
- ✓ WSCUC has developed a Graduation Rate Dashboard (GRD) that measures undergraduate retention and graduation rates
- ✓ The GRD provides insight into the unit accumulation, redemption and abandonment patterns of undergraduate students at the institutional level

WSCUC #2

Characteristics of the GRD:

- ✓ Builds on 6 data points
- ✓ Covers 8 years of trends
- ✓ Results in 2 completion measures: Unit Redemption Rate and Absolute Graduation Rate

WSCUC #3

- ✓ There are no specific graduation rate thresholds that institutions are required to meet to have a successful (re)accreditation outcome.
- ✓ Institutions are asked to “engage” with the GRD, determining whether it adds to their understanding of student success
- ✓ Peer evaluator team reports comment on retention and graduation rate data, trends in these as well as institutions’ approaches to monitoring and evaluating retention and graduation data
- ✓ WSCUC has developed a comparability tool available on its website as a resource for institutions and peer evaluators to better understand and improve graduation rates.

Thank you for your attention