Quality International

As new providers of higher education join traditional colleges and universities in providing education, what quality assurance tools will be needed?

In August 2014, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and its International Quality Group (CIQG) presented a Webinar "Exploring External Quality Review for Non-Institutional Providers" to address this question. 152 higher education and quality assurance professionals and the public from Barbados to Israel joined the Webinar to explore the concept of a quality platform: a voluntary, nongovernmental external review of noninstitutional providers undertaken by an expert team.

The purpose of the quality platform is to equip students and the public with reliable information about a provider's quality as its offerings are used for improvement of work skills, general education, general intellectual development or pursuit of college credit. The quality platform is based on self-evaluation by the provider and an external peer review process using standards with primary emphasis on student outcomes and assuring quality. The platform will be piloted by CHEA. This Webinar presentation is now on the CHEA Website. Please visit it.

Warm regards,

Mark Grace
Director, CIQG
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Interview with Dr. Jagannath Patil

Dr. Jagannath Patil, adviser to India's National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and current president of the Asian Pacific Quality Network (APQN), responds to CIQG questions on Indian higher education and quality assurance. Dr. Patil has coordinated assessment and accreditation exercises for approximately 800 higher education institutions.

Dr. Jagannath Patil, President, Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN)

In March 2014, India's accreditor of institutions, NAAC, was granted greater autonomy by the Indian government. NAAC functions under the Indian University Grants Commission and coordinates quality-related activities, including the adoption and sharing of effective practices for the development of a quality culture at Indian institutions. The International Labor Organization has estimated that by 2020, India will have 116 million workers between 20 and 24 years old who will need a quality education to be properly prepared for the global workforce. Also, Indian institutions are concerned to provide liberal or general education. With just one-sixth of the country's colleges and less than 30 percent of Indian universities accredited, NAAC has witnessed a significant surge in submissions for accreditation. CIQG interviewed Dr. Patil to learn more about this and about what changes NAAC might anticipate.

Question 1. With NAAC granted autonomy by the Indian government and given higher education enrollment targets of nearly 30 percent of India's 1.1 billion people as well as ambitious quality assurance expectations for the country's colleges and universities, what are your greatest leadership challenges?

The Indian higher education system is now the largest in the world in terms of number of higher education institutions (HEIs). This number is bound to increase with the ambitious target of raising General Education Requirements (GER) to 30 percent by 2020. The key challenge will be to ensure the quality of HEIs and programs which are expanding at such a great pace. A significant step in this direction has been taken by making accreditation mandatory for all HEIs that are under the purview of the University Grants Commission (UGC).

The real issue now is about the capacity building of accreditation bodies so the huge task of assessing over 38,000 colleges and 700 plus universities in a 5-year cycle can be completed. Currently, NAAC is the only accreditation body that undertakes institutional accreditation of all types of HEIs. There are just a few others engaged in accreditation of specialized programmes like engineering and agriculture. Two plans to address this issue are being pursued. One is to expand NAAC's capacity by strengthening its headquarters and setting up regional centers across five zones of the country. The second plan suggested at Ministry level and the UGC is to recognize multiple quality assurance (QA) bodies.

In my recently published [article](#) co-authored with Prof Rai, Director NAAC, we have pleaded for setting up a national quality assurance framework for higher education, which will provide the basis for creation, recognition and monitoring of multiple accreditation bodies in India, taking a cue from global practices.

Another challenge is to develop a national qualifications framework (NQF) for the Indian higher education system, which could pave the way for enhanced student mobility within and outside the country. It is also needed to promote inter-operability of the NQFs of other countries.

One more challenge is to popularize accreditation among students and employers. Unlike the USA, accreditation has yet to become a major consideration of students while making choices of HEIs and programmes.

Question 2. The Indian Prime Minister has spoken to the need for an independent India-specific ranking system for higher education institutions. How have the colleges and universities reacted, and what role, if any, will NAAC play?

Many academics have welcomed the idea of alternate rankings as suggested by our Prime Minister and the Human Resource Development Minister. Developing countries like India always had concerns about popular global rankings as these rankings are often criticized for favoring well-established universities in Western economies. There are also debates about criteria, methodology and transparency of certain global rankings.

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NAAC has worked on a project of developing quality benchmarks for assessment of universities in the past. Even as instances of QA bodies venturing into rankings are rare, I believe NAAC has the necessary expertise to develop alternate rankings which can factor in issues like access and equity besides quality, which are critical in an Indian context of higher education. Many state universities of India have a major objective of providing access of higher education to marginalized sections of the society. Efforts taken by universities to cater to a first generation of higher education entrants deserve due acknowledgement while measuring and comparing performance of these HEIs.

Question 3. Thinking about India's future role in higher education and quality assurance, does NAAC have an internationalization strategy and, if so, what is its focus?

Being a national accreditation agency, NAAC's strategies towards internationalization are aligned with the country's higher education internationalization policy. I think the new regime in New Delhi is likely to unfold a series of measures towards internationalizing Indian higher education. NAAC has been at the forefront of quality assurance networking for the last decade.

We are very active in the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) and several international projects like Mutual Recognition of QA and Student Participation in Quality are being conducted. NAAC is considered a resource centre for external quality assurance and several QA agencies depute their QA staff for on-site training at NAAC every year. In my view, the focus of our international strategy, being the country that sends the second largest number of students abroad, should be to have active collaboration with QA bodies of major student destinations like the USA, Europe and Australia to ensure mutually beneficial international mobility promoting mutual recognition of qualifications and skills.

Another focus could be to create regional QA frameworks for encouraging student mobility within South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation countries, where India is also an exporter of higher education.

Question 4. As new stakeholders such as private institutions, providers of massive open online courses and providers of badges in higher education emerge, what national policy responses might be expected from NAAC?

Global (Massive Open Online Courses) MOOCs are likely to have their largest chunk of users from India in the near future. I believe we need to evolve an entirely new set of tools in collaboration with stakeholders, including cross-border providers, national regulators and students 1) to ensure that good quality education reaches students at reasonable cost and 2) to keep check on dubious online providers who can take students for a ride by offering cheap qualifications which are not acceptable anywhere.

The Asia Pacific Quality Network has already set up a project to develop tools for QA of MOOCs and open educational resources (OERs). NAAC would benefit from this initiative.

Question 5. Has NAAC made any significant changes in its use of technology to support or advance its quality assurance initiatives?

A significant part of NAAC's assessment and accreditation process is now computerized. Hundreds of affiliated colleges that apply to NAAC are now first subjected to a completely online process of institutional eligibility for quality assessment (IEQA). A proposal to have end-to-end computerized solution is being prepared. NAAC is ready with a Detailed Project Report (DPR) to have resources, both technical and human, so that it can handle over 5,000 accreditation proposals every year. Options like E-assessment and select or random peer review are being considered as alternatives to traditional style of on-site visits.

(The views expressed in this interview are personal academic opinions and they do not reflect official views of NAAC or APQN.)

Quality Assurance Developments in Africa

CIQG Advisory Council member Peter Okebukola, President, Global University Network for Innovation-Africa (Nigeria), was part of the organizing team for the 6th International Conference and Workshops on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa, *"Post 2015: Emerging Developments In Quality Assurance In Higher Education In Africa,"* held in Bujumbura, Burundi, September 15-19, 2014.

The conference acknowledged and affirmed the growth and continuing development of quality assurance agencies on the African continent and delivered important viewpoints on the need to focus on student assessment and credential credibility as more programs and delivery methods diversify.

Peter Okebukola, President Global University Network for Innovation

You can read the full summary of conclusions and communiqué of the event *here*.

CHEA and the Presidents' Forum Explore the Emergence of Alternative Providers of Higher Education

The Commission on Quality Assurance and Alternative Higher Education – established by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the Presidents' Forum – has issued a paper on its work *Quality Assurance and Alternative Higher Education: A Policy Perspective* (*click here* to read the full paper). The Commission paper frames six questions for further inquiry and action.

The Commission was established to explore the growth of the noninstitutional sector of higher education (providers other than traditional colleges and universities that offer courses, modules or badges) and whether some form of external quality review that is both voluntary and nonregulatory would be desirable. More information on the Commission and its work is included in the paper.

Rankings in Institutional Strategies and Processes: Impact or Illusion?

by Ellen Hazelkorn, Tia Loukkola and Thérèse Zhang

This first pan-European survey of higher education institutions seeks to understand how they use rankings and the impact and influence that rankings are having on them. To what extent have institutional strategies or processes been affected or changed because of rankings? To what extent have rankings influenced institutional priorities or activities or led to some areas being given more emphasis than others so as to improve an institution's ranking position? How have stakeholders been influenced? The survey was complemented by site visits to six universities and a Roundtable of university managers and stakeholders, both of which were used to support the analysis of the data and form conclusions.

Published by the European University Association in 2014, the study identifies challenges associated with the precise role that rankings play in institutional strategies and processes and how rankings are used, whether as a source of additional information, for benchmarking, to guide decision-making or for marketing purposes. It also addresses the use of the term "rankings" in relation to institutional performance, how rankings serve as one of a number of sources of information about institutional performance and the different ways in which groups within and outside higher education use rankings.

The survey is available on the European University Website at *http://goo.gl/6ZmPQy*.

"Building Confidence and Acceptance for European Quality Assurance"

by Colin Tück

> **Colin Tück, Director at the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), talks about the evolution of EQAR and the Bologna Process.**

Colin Tück, Director, European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) is the first and only organisation that directly emerged from the Bologna Process. Founded in 2008 by the E4 Group[1] at the request of European ministers responsible for higher education, EQAR manages a register of quality assurance agencies that comply with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).
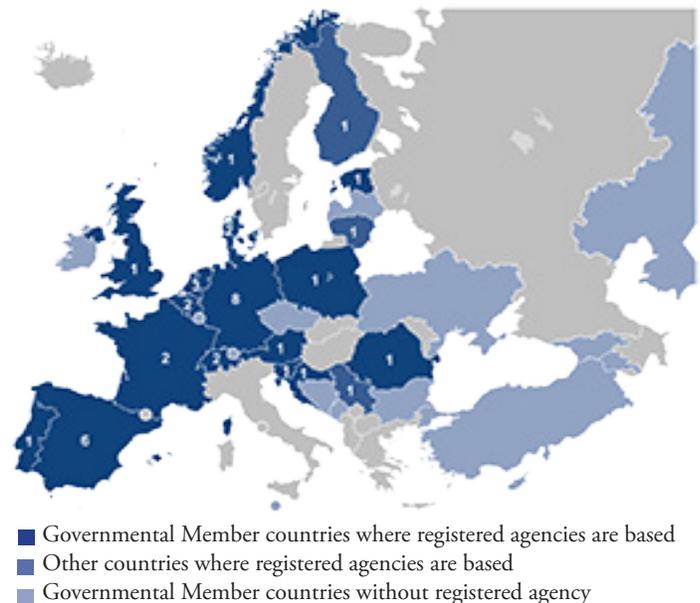
Six years later, EQAR lists 37 agencies from 18 European countries (*see map*) that demonstrated their substantial compliance with the ESG. What has helped EQAR to develop and gain acceptance?

A Sustainable and Focused Organisation

EQAR is a **small organisation based on modest, but sustainable resources**: The largest part of its annual budget of €275 000 comes from annual contributions by European governments and stakeholders. This allows EQAR to discharge its core functions supported by a staff of three without depending on project funding and with relatively small fees charged to agencies.

Also because of its modest budget, EQAR has had to keep focus on its role as a register, and the objectives linked to that, and to refrain from engaging into other areas with a risk of jeopardising its independent position.

Through its policies and decisions, the EQAR Register Committee has demonstrated this independence and its commitment to transparency: full decisions on agencies' application for registration are public, regular reports are made to European governments and stakeholders, and a system of dealing with complaints regarding registered agencies is in place.

■ Governmental Member countries where registered agencies are based
■ Other countries where registered agencies are based
■ Governmental Member countries without registered agency

External Evaluation of EQAR

In 2011, EQAR was **evaluated externally by an independent international expert team**, coordinated by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. The level of independence was something for which the evaluation panel commended EQAR and its Register Committee. While EQAR's financial resources might be modest, this is an important asset.

The evaluation led also EQAR to take up a more strategic role: EQAR developed a Strategic Plan and now organises an annual Members' Dialogue, serving as a unique forum for policy discussions amongst European governments and stakeholders.

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[1] The European stakeholder organisations representing higher education institutions (EUA, EURASHE), quality assurance agencies (ENQA) and students (ESU).

The Bologna Process Going Further

The most remarkable development since 2008 is how the **Bologna Process has caused a shift in EQAR's mission and role**: In 2012, ministers committed[2] to allow EQAR-registered agencies to operate across borders and to recognise their decisions. Linked to that, EQAR launched a project[3] on Recognition of International Quality Assurance Activity (RIQAA), with final results to be presented this autumn.

Regrettably, progress has been slow and many countries hesitate to open their systems to foreign quality assurance agencies, referring to national responsibility or particularities of their systems.

Even though the ESG are widely accepted, not all countries are willing to put trust on a systematic basis and recognise all those that have proven to work in line with the ESG.

One finding of the RIQAA project is that higher education institutions are keen to use the opportunities offered by cross-border quality assurance activities: They see a chance to enhance their international profile and to get external quality assurance that suits their own profile and benefits them most in their quality development.

With the revision[4] of the ESG, the common denominator for quality assurance in Europe is becoming larger: the close link to the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA), describing qualifications in terms of learning outcomes, makes clear what quality assurance in line with the ESG stands for. Some ambiguity has been removed, and the revised ESG will make the "EHEA model" for quality assurance clearer and more visible.

In this light, it will be harder to deny that there is a sound, reliable and systematic basis for trust and recognition. EQAR will continue to promote a coherent quality assurance framework for the EHEA, in which institutions have the freedom to turn to any EQAR-registered agency for their external quality assurance reviews and where qualifications are universally recognised. But it is also up to institutions and agencies to call upon their governments to open additional opportunities for them to work together across borders.

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[2] Bucharest Communiqué, http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/(1)/Bucharest%20Communique%202012(1).pdf

[3] See https://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/eqar_internal/MD/MD4/P_141021_RIQAA_FinalConference_EQAR_MD.pdf

[4] See http://revisionesg.wordpress.com

CHEA 2015 Annual Conference

January 26 (evening) - January 28
Change, Challenge and Accreditation

and

CHEA International Quality Group Annual Meeting

January 28 (evening) - January 29
Quality Assurance: Whose Responsibility?

Capital Hilton, Washington, DC

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Launched in September, 2012, the CHEA International Quality Group (CIQG) serves as a U.S.-based international forum for quality assurance and accreditation. The CIQG provides services to CIQG members intended to advance understanding of international quality assurance, assist institutions and accreditation/quality assurance organizations in their expanding international engagement and further enhance capacity for academic quality in international higher education.

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