The Asia Pacific Region: Changes and Challenges to Quality Assurance

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Six Patterns Evident in A-P Region

- Relative "newness" of QA in the region: the 1990s as the decade of quality

- Government Centered but with variations

- Extensive engagement in regional network activities

- Explicit governmental supported activities designed to improve higher education quality

- Emergence of international QA engagements and "statusing" of such efforts; emergence of "global" perspectives

- Hyper importance of rankings in the AP context

- (Reference: 2011 APEC meeting on Quality Assurance, Honolulu, August 4-6, 2011. http://publications.apec.org/publication-detail.php?pub_id=120)

Getting Started on QA

- Focus on establishment in the 1980-90s—the latter the decade of quality:

- Malaysia, China, Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, India, Thailand

- Exceptions: Australia and New Zealand; Philippines, Japan

Context of QA Emergence and Growth in Region

- Decline of academic standards due to rapid massification of Higher Education
- Loss of public confidence in HEIs
- Budget cuts and pressure to increase efficiency in public expenditures
- Greater public accountability
- Changing H.E. context
- Side effects of university rankings

Dominant Assumptions in All National Systems

- Fundamental understanding that economic growth and development in each economy is highly dependent on a globally competitive higher education system.

- Presumption that jobs of the future across the entire APEC region will increasingly require a workforce and citizenry with higher order capacities and skills presumably primarily available through higher education.

- Increasing the research capacity of the higher education system will drive economic growth and increased well being.

- These assumptions more likely to be taken as policy presumptions rather than as conditional problematics.

Diversity in National Quality Assurance Approaches

- Multiple meanings for the concept of quality itself
- Purpose and functions of QAA—internal (improvement); external (evaluation; accountability and transparency; steering and funding; accreditation and recognition)
- Methodologies used in QAA—sometimes within same country, e.g. India
- Responsible agency/unit (Government or HEI-originated; different reporting channels within government.)
- Issues of ownership and stakeholders (public funding vs self-sustaining)
- Voluntary (e.g., Philippines/Malaysia) or compulsory nature of participation (e.g., China/Thailand/HK/China)
- Focus on research or Teaching-Learning or both
- Focus on the review of programs or institutions (or both: e.g.,Taiwan)
- The reporting (confidential/public/ranking, e.g. PI with 4 Bands, India with nine grades)
- The range of follow-up activities

Institutional Diversity and Resultant Challenges to QA

- Different types of higher education institutions include:
  - traditional universities, virtual universities, polytechnics, technical institutes, open learning institutes, and community colleges.
- Different types of providers:
  - as public and private provision, for-profit and non-for-profit providers.
- As higher education systems expand, an urgent need to seek alternative sources of funding.
  - Multiple sources of funding include public, private, community, philanthropic, public and private partnerships.
- In recent years, many countries have privatized higher education, corporatized their public universities, implemented cost-recovery through tuition fees, developed off-shore programs, set up foreign branch-campuses and recruited more foreign students, all of which are aimed at mobilizing resources for higher education.

Convergence in Core Elements

- Evaluation based on pre-determined and transparent criteria

- Process based on a combination of self study and peer review

- Final decision-making

- Public disclosure of the outcome—occasional point scales or differentiated scoring (e.g. Indonesia, India)

- Validity of the outcome for a specific period of time

- Given diversity of region, old is always new for some

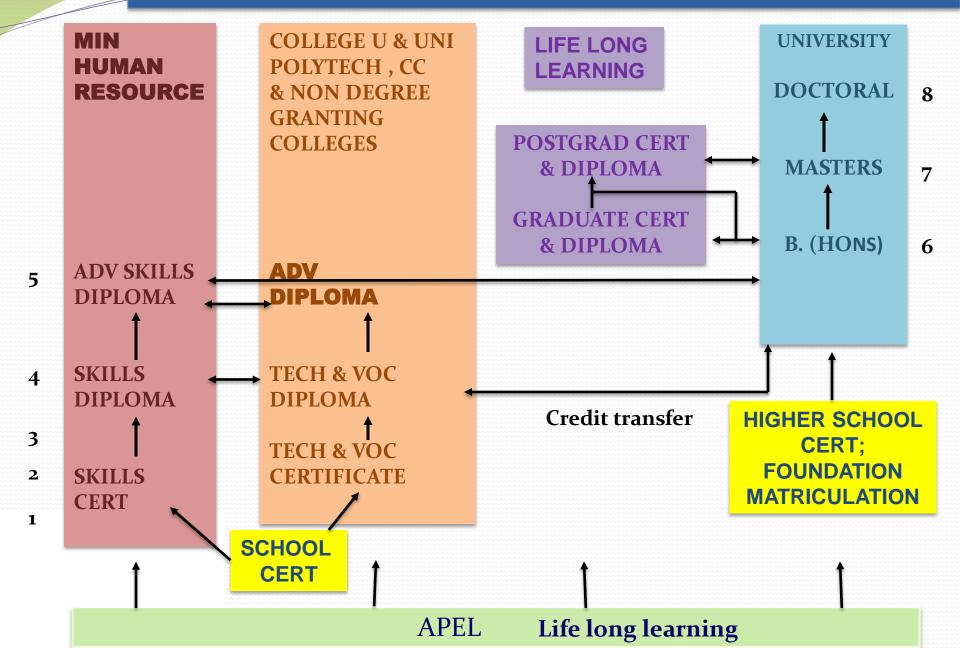# Quality Mechanisms for QA Agencies

- Internal controls: internal audits, annual reporting requirements, feedback from stakeholders, feedback from international observers.

- Voluntary coordination within regional networks

- External reviews

- Alignment with good practices and external reviews of QA networks such as APQN

- Application of good practices established by International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)—use of its data base of Good Practices in Quality Assurance (GPQA). (http://www.inqaahe.org/main/other-resources-for-members)

The Qualifications Framework Approach

- Malaysia example—through Malaysian Qualifications Agency
- Unites all national qualifications awarded:
  - by certified providers within or outside the formal education system,
  - through e-learning, verifiable workplace training and experiences individually-driven life long learning,
- Including post secondary schools, colleges including community colleges, universities, polytechnics and other vocational and technical institutions, other higher educational institutions, professional organizations, guilds and industry-related organizations.

Qualification Frameworks and Recognition

- Increasing mobility of students, academic programs, and labor across national borders raises issues of qualifications recognition

- Close link between recognition of qualifications and quality assurance and accreditation--becoming more difficult to determine exactly what the value of a foreign qualification is because of the diversity of programs, qualifications, delivery modes and the proliferation of non-formal learning

- Assessing the value of a qualification complicated yet evaluators, employers, professional bodies, etc. become increasingly interested in determining the quality of an institution, program or qualification

- Therefore, recognition and credential evaluation agencies increasingly appeal to quality assurance agencies to inform them of the quality status of institutions and degrees

Differentiated Strategies and Impacts

Level	Desired impact
APEC Regional	Sharing, mobility, recognition, international standards, recognitizational programs
Country	Access, equity, frame and meet national needs
System	Raise quality where needed—focus on creating closer variance across institutions
Institution	Focus on improvement, outcomes,
Program	Demonstrate quality outcomes
Faculty/Course	Improve teaching, use of changing technologies, introductions of changing ecologies of learning

Major Regional Initiatives

- APQN the primary example of regional initiative and cooperation
- Registered 2004, First Secretariat at Australian University Quality Agency [AUQA…now the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)]
- APQN membership levels: Full Member, Intermediate Member, Associate Member and Institutional Member. Accepts observers from outside the region. As of 15 May 2011, 82 members from 33 countries and territories in the region. 27 are full members, 13 intermediate members, 31 institutional members and 6 associate members.
- Summary of five years: shift from heavy reliance on internal and ad hoc measures towards systematic benchmarking and external review of QA agencies against regionally and internationally accepted good practices.
- Current secretariat located at Shanghai Education Evaluation Institute; support from World Bank; acknowledged for its impact
- APQN conducts project on external review of QA agencies
- ASEAN Quality Network—QA agencies of ASEAN
- 2009 formation of QA for Islamic Universities

Growing Policy Convergence

- A clear set of goals is held in common by countries throughout the region:
  - To provide access and effective capacity for both economic development and to meet the broad needs of citizenries;
  - Ensure that institutions of higher education possess quality, responsive to societal needs, and capable of adapting to the changes being wrought by increasing global interdependence;
  - Ensure that quality assurance effectively engages all institutions of higher education with both transparency and accountability.

Positive Government Efforts to Enhance HE Quality

- China—985 and 211
- Korea—Brain 21
- Japan—Centers of Excellence
- Thailand—Rajabhat conversion and regional collaboration of technical universities (Rajamangala Institutes)
- Innovation Centers
- Twinning programs (both domestic and international)
- Cross-border education provision

Internationalization and Globalization

- Ranges of internationalization
    - Regional Networks—primarily APQN
    - Specialized program accreditation (medicine, engineering, architecture)
    - Facilitation of cross-border education

- The rise of the global university
    - National University of Singapore as an exemplar
    - Elements: a viable strategic plan that clearly lays out directions to be taken and the resources required
    - long term commitment to the task and sufficient funding to support such an endeavor (often from public sources)
    - and highly selected areas of excellence that become the focus of developing comparative value.

Rankings as a New Quality Context

- Status of rankings as a system of quality markers
- Importance of rankings in the Asia Pacific Context
- The primacy of the Shanghai Jiao Tong University rankings of World Universities (Academic Ranking of World Universities-ARWU) and those of the Times Literary Supplement
- Reality of distance between globalization ranking markets and those "others" themselves
- Distortions in allowing ranking universities to create default "quality" institutions
- Reality of creating a status structure for global exchange

Net Effects

- Gap between the formalisms of stipulations, standards, even processes, and the consequence of achieved quality

- The reality of having a relative consistency between levels of economic and social development and levels of quality assurance in a region where some higher education systems are poorly developed (e.g.Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia) and countries in which they are of relatively or absolutely higher quality (e.g. Korea, Japan, China, Thailand.)

Trends

- Increasing recognition of the role and importance of higher education for human and economic development.
- The ranking phenomenon is "here to stay" and has become an important component of how countries seek to build and maintain their national standing and give public policy salience to "quality".
- QA systems with all their similarities and differences have become increasingly important to assure both institutional and system quality of higher education, and will be of similar importance to the making and implementation of public policy across a variety of content areas (e.g. economic, environmental, civic engagement, etc.)
- However, in several countries China, Japan, Taiwan and Malaysia away from government centric-QA and toward allowing institution self-assessment and institutional review under certain conditions.
- Across the globe and certainly within higher education (however conceived and realized) the rate of change is increasing, creating a need for new and ongoing forms of information and knowledge exchanges across a wide variety of content areas.

Major QA Issues in Asia Pacific Region and How They Might Affect Higher Education

- Possible outcomes and consequences
  - A: Triumph of style over substance—formalism fails to effectively determine quality
  - B: The reductionism of rankings as de facto quality
  - C: Triumph of diversity over commonality
  - D: Emergence of authentic regional initiatives with effective regulatory impact (e.g. mutual recognition, coherent qualification frameworks)
  - E: Lack of coherence between national developmental goals and QA (e.g. Vietnam and 20,000 Ph.D's by 2020.)
  - F: Inherent tensions between access, equity, capacity and quality in higher education development.