Future Directions of Quality Assurance

Perspectives from 10 Agencies
Future Directions of Quality Assurance: Perspectives from 10 Agencies
Future Directions of Quality Assurance: Perspectives from 10 Agencies

A publication by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications to mark its 25th Anniversary
## Contents

Foreword  2  
Acknowledgements  3  
Overview of Global Developments  4  
Part I: The Evolution of Quality Assurance in Hong Kong and the Challenges Ahead  11  
Part II: Future Directions of Quality Assurance from a Global Perspective  
   Chapter 1 Australia  19  
   Chapter 2 Dubai  24  
   Chapter 3 Ireland  33  
   Chapter 4 Japan  38  
   Chapter 5 Malaysia  43  
   Chapter 6 New Zealand  49  
   Chapter 7 Singapore  60  
   Chapter 8 The United Kingdom  64  
Concluding Remarks  69
Foreword

This publication has been prepared to mark the 25th anniversary of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ). It is a special collection of observations and analysis on the current situation, future directions and challenges of quality assurance in Hong Kong and eight countries around the world, namely Australia, Dubai, Ireland, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Kingdom.

Education has been undergoing and continues to experience significant changes all over the world. The waves of education reforms, internationalisation and technological developments have led to growing public concern about the standards and quality of education provision. As education continues to evolve, it is important that external quality assurance mechanisms address the need of the society that it serves, and keep in pace with new developments and changes both domestically and abroad.

Recognising this need, HKCAAVQ invited contributions from its partner agencies to produce this publication. This initiative is also part of our ongoing efforts to collaborate with partner quality assurance bodies to exchange information and share experiences and good practices.

At our 20th Anniversary Conference, we had an in-depth discussion about where the signposts were pointing at a crossroads for quality assurance. Five years have passed, we are excited to see many new developments and initiatives being taken around the world in an attempt to strengthen external quality assurance. As we move on this journey, HKCAAVQ looks forward to working more closely with our partners to meet the challenges of changing times.

We hope that the overview of quality assurance presented in this publication will be useful not only to the quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions, but also industry stakeholders, policy makers, researchers, academics and general public.
Acknowledgements

This publication builds on the work of many individuals within and outside HKCAAVQ. We are fortunate to have received their valuable support in preparing this publication.

Thanks are due particularly to the following contributing agencies with which HKCAAVQ has signed Memoranda of Cooperation, for their efforts and willingness to participate and share their insights on the future directions of quality assurance and the challenges foreseen in their countries:

- Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA), New Zealand
- Council for Private Education (CPE), Singapore
- Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), Dubai
- Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), Malaysia
- National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE), Japan
- New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), New Zealand
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), Ireland
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), Australia
- The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), the United Kingdom

Last but not least our sincere thanks go to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) for its permission to use the article 'The Quiet Quality Assurance Revolution in the Early 21st Century' written by Jamil Salmi and originally published in CHEA's publication titled *Is Big Brother Watching You? The Evolving Role of the State in Regulating and Conducting Quality Assurance* (2015).
Overview of Global Developments

The Quiet Quality Assurance Revolution
in the Early 21st Century

Jamil Salmi 1

Until the 1980s, tertiary education institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries were the only ones in the world with a strong tradition of external quality assurance (QA). In the absence of a federal Ministry of Higher Education, the quality assurance function was carried out essentially through private accreditation agencies. This continues to be the prevailing modality today, unlike what happens elsewhere in the world.

This all started to change in the 1980s and the 1990s, as most Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) countries moved to establish some form of government-sanctioned quality assurance. Van Damme (2002) explains the rapid expansion of quality assurance in this period as the combination of at least five factors at play in many countries. First, the transition from elite to mass higher education led to concerns about a possible decline in academic standards. Second, employers lost confidence in the ability of tertiary education institutions to maintain the relevance of their programs in an increasingly competitive and global economy. Third, as governments reduced funding for tertiary education because of fiscal restrictions, they called for greater accountability in the use of public resources. Fourth, the growing competitiveness within and across tertiary education systems made it more important to have tangible measures of quality. Finally, stakeholders began to demand more transparency in tertiary education as far as quality was concerned. For example, the first college ranking published in 1983 by U.S. News and World Report responded to this

1 This article was originally published in the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) International Quality Group (CIQG) Publication Series titled Is Big Brother Watching You? The Evolving Role of the State in Regulating and Conducting Quality Assurance (2015). HKCAAQVQ has been granted the permission by CHEA to use the overview section of the publication written by Jamil Salmi, former World Bank Tertiary Education Coordinator, for the purpose of this publication.
societal preoccupation for more information about the performance of tertiary education institutions.

Europe witnessed a considerable drive as a direct result of the Bologna process officially launched in 1999. One of the most important dimensions of the Bologna process activities has indeed been the development and/or strengthening of quality assurance in all participating countries, based on the principles issued through the Berlin Communiqué in 2003, and the Standards and Guidelines prepared by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and adopted by the Ministers of Education/Higher Education in 2005 at the Bergen meeting. By 2008, most countries had a functioning evaluation or accreditation agency. The European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) has been a strong factor in influencing QA agencies wishing to integrate the community of national systems recognized as being in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines. The successful convergence of QA regulations has been one of Bologna's most noticeable outcomes.

The former socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have also been keen to participate in this process. Today, most of them have a quality assurance system in place, even though the capacity is still unequal, as reflected by the fact that many of the agencies from these countries have not been accepted as full members of ENQA. For example, the agencies from Albania, Armenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Russia, and the Slovak Republic are only affiliate members.

Whereas only a minority of developing countries had a formal quality assurance system by the turn of the century, the QA movement has gained tremendous momentum in the past 15 years. In Latin America, the first quality assurance body was established in Mexico in 1991, followed two years later by a national accreditation agency in Colombia. In the following two decades, most countries in the region set up a national quality assurance body, with the exception of the Central American nations, which started with a regional
accreditation agency. Today Uruguay is the only country in the region without any formal quality assurance and accreditation body, although the Ministry of Education is responsible for licensing new private universities. In the majority of cases the quality assurance agencies have been operating as independent bodies, but in three countries, Ecuador, El Salvador and Nicaragua, the government has maintained direct control of the quality assurance body.

Asia and the Middle East have experienced a similar evolution. In South-East Asia, Indonesia took the lead in establishing a national quality assurance agency in 1994, followed over the next two decades by almost all the countries in the region. Today, Myanmar is the only tertiary education system without a formal external quality assurance department or agency. In the Arab world, the first decade of the new century saw the creation of quality assurance systems in most countries, 11 out of the 17 main countries in the region by 2009. Yemen was the twelfth nation, and today only five countries are without a formally established QA system. Two of them, Lebanon and Tunisia, are at an advanced stage in the setting up process.

Africa is perhaps the region where the quality assurance movement has been slowest. By 2006, only six countries had a fully established quality assurance agency, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa being the pioneers in that domain. In the past eight years, however, progress has been impressive, and today, 23 countries have a national QA agency. The concluding declaration of a recent pan-African conference on quality assurance urges all countries that do not have with a proper QA system to put one in place as a matter of priority, especially in view of the growing importance of private tertiary education and e-learning (Jongsma, 2014).

As a result of this worldwide phenomenon, countries can be characterized today as belonging to one of the following four categories:

- Advanced systems whose tertiary education institutions have well-developed internal quality assurance processes with a strong focus on quality enhancement, in line with national standards defined by the
external quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies, often linked to
the national qualifications framework; leading OECD economies would be
in this category.

- Well-established systems still relying predominantly on external quality
  assurance, where a significant proportion of tertiary education institutions
do not fully meet the national quality assurance standards; many industrial
and developing countries would be in this category.

- Countries that are in the process of setting up and consolidating their
  quality assurance system; many developing countries and countries in
transition in Eastern Europe and Central Asia would be in that category.

- Countries that have not established a formal quality assurance system;
  these would encompass a few countries in Asia, the Middle East, Latin
America and the Caribbean and the Middle East, and about two dozen
countries in Africa.

It is worth mentioning in this brief account of the modern history of quality
assurance that, in parallel with the spread of national quality assurance
agencies, the quality assurance movement has also taken on an important
international dimension under the impulsion of the donor community (Wells,
2014). First, the German academic exchange agency, Deutsche Akademische
Austausch Dienst (DAAD), undertook in the late 1990s to help the Spanish-
speaking Central American countries build up their capacity to carry out
accreditation, resulting in the establishment of a regional accreditation body
(Consejo Centroamericano de Acreditación de la Educación Superior) in 2004.
The premise of this project was that a regional agency could serve their quality
assurance needs in a more effective manner than if each country would set
up its own accreditation organism, from the viewpoint of achieving a critical
mass of peer reviewers and reducing the risk of conflict of interest that small
countries invariably face. DAAD is currently following a similar approach to
support the development of quality assurance in West Africa.
Second, alarmed by the impact of the rapid growth of cross-border education on quality, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the OECD teamed up between 2003 and 2005 to elaborate guidelines in support of all stakeholders involved in the provision of cross-border education programs (governments, providers, faculty members, students, quality assurance agencies, professional associations). The joint document resulting from this effort offers a synthesis of good practices and proposes tools to monitor and improve the quality and relevance of cross-border education in order to protect students from below-standard practices (UNESCO and OECD, 2005).

In 2008, UNESCO also joined forces with the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the U.S. professional association in charge of recognizing accreditation bodies, to address the growing issue of diploma mills and accreditation mills, which offer and sanction worthless degrees affecting thousands of students not aware that they are exposed to fraudulent practices. Their 2009 Declaration sought to provide guidance to countries and quality assurance agencies keen on combating dishonest practices in tertiary education (CHEA and UNESCO, 2009). The official Communiqué of the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education further alerted Member States to the alarming phenomenon of degree mills (UNESCO, 2009).

Third, the World Bank tertiary education strategy published in 2002 (Constructing Knowledge Societies) identified quality assurance as a global public good.

Globalization and the growth of borderless education raise important issues that affect tertiary education in all countries but that are often beyond the control of any one government. Among the challenges of particular concern to countries seeking to build up their advanced human capital capacity are new forms of brain drain that result in a loss of local capacity in fields critical to development; the absence of a proper international accreditation and qualifications framework; the dearth of accepted legislation regarding foreign tertiary education providers...
The rapid development of virtual providers of tertiary education programs on a global scale, the increasing mobility of professionals across national borders, and the absence of quality assurance infrastructure and capacity in many developing countries make it important to establish an international framework that sets out minimum common standards worldwide (World Bank, 2002, pp. 98 and 101).

Following up on this recognition, the World Bank set aside grant resources to support the strengthening of INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education), the international umbrella association for quality assurance, and the development of quality assurance regional networks. A series of Development Grants helped establish the Asian and Pacific network (APQN) first, followed by the Latin American network (RIACES) and then by networks in the Arab (ANQAHE), African (AfriQAN) and Caribbean (CANQATE) regions. These grants culminated with a collaborative project, the Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC), financed by the World Bank and managed by UNESCO, to consolidate the regional networks. More recently, the German cooperation program and the European Union have supported the development of AQAN, the ASEAN quality assurance network.

Finally, it is important to note that this significant transformation of the tertiary education landscape has, interestingly, happened without too much controversy. In contrast to reforms in the areas of governance and financing, which have more often than not generated heated debates and encountered strong resistance in the academic community, the development of quality assurance has been widely accepted in most countries across all regions of the world. This can be explained by a combination of two major forces. First, the evolving balance in the steering of tertiary education systems has generally meant greater institutional autonomy and growing reliance on market mechanisms in exchange for increased accountability, including through formal quality assurance mechanisms (World Bank, 2002). Second, as described in the previous paragraphs, external factors at the global and regional levels have heavily influenced national and institutional behaviors.
While the Bologna process has been a powerful vector of convergence in Europe, in developing countries the emergence of regional QA networks has acted as a strong catalyst. In addition, the expansion of cross-border education has reinforced the perceived need for regulatory and quality assurance measures in many corners of the planet.
Part I

The Evolution of Quality Assurance in Hong Kong and the Challenges Ahead
Introduction of HKCAAVQ

The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), formerly the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA) was established in 1990 as an independent statutory body to perform academic accreditation for non-university institutions funded by the then University and Polytechnics Grants Committee. In 2007, the Council was reconstituted under the HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Chapter 1150), also taking on the statutory roles as the Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register (QR) Authority under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) under the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (Chapter 592).

Our core functions include:

- accrediting academic and vocational programmes to ensure that they meet minimum quality standards for entry into the QR. We are also responsible for maintaining the QR;
- assessing non-local qualifications of individuals to check how they compare with local qualifications;
- supporting operators' continuous improvement work through a robust external quality assurance process; and
- undertaking research and consultancy work for upholding the quality of vocational education and training and post-secondary education both locally and internationally.

HKCAAVQ adopts a systematic and consistent approach to assessing institutions and programmes by using a Four-stage Quality Assurance Process to accredit non-self-accrediting institutions and their programmes. The Process applies to both higher education and vocational operators, with flexibility to cater for the different types of operators in terms of evidence requirements. We make public the outcomes of accreditation by publishing the summary accreditation reports on our website (www.hkcaavq.edu.hk).
As at June 2015, the QR lists 7,872 qualifications offered by 234 operators, half of them are from the non-self-accrediting sector quality assured by HKCAAVQ.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accreditation body / qualification type</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-accrediting (UGC-funded sector, includes CityU, CUHK, HKBU, HKIEd, HKU, HKUST, LU, PolyU; JQRC; and OUHK)</td>
<td>3,432</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-self-accrediting</td>
<td>3,938</td>
<td>50.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition of Prior Learning from Appointed Assessment Agencies</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>7,872</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HKCAAVQ is a founding member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN). We are also an Affiliate of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

**Future Direction and Challenges of Quality Assurance**

2015 marks the 25th anniversary of HKCAAVQ as Hong Kong's statutory quality assurance agency. Any effective quality assurance body has to reflect the developments of the education environment it operates in. HKCAAVQ has had to adapt to a number of developments to its role over its 25-year existence. The two developments that have most substantially shaped the current role of HKCAAVQ are:

1. the Hong Kong Chief Executive's Policy Address in 2000 that stressed the importance of post-secondary education to meet the needs of a knowledge-based society and announced a doubling of the associate degree places over a ten year period; and
2. the launch of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) in 2008 that extended HKCAAVQ's responsibilities to include vocational education and training (VET) in addition to higher education and introduced legislation that named HKCAAVQ as the Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register Authority under the HKQF.
It is mandatory for local programmes offered by non-self-accrediting institutions carrying the award titles of associate degree, higher diploma, Bachelor degree and other degrees to be accredited by HKCAAVQ. It is voluntary for vocational education and training operators to seek accreditation of their programmes as well as for operators of non-local programmes in Hong Kong.

**Quality Assurance Approach**

HKCAAVQ is working with a diverse group of operators ranging from small (in terms of student numbers) VET providers offering specialised programmes at QF levels 1-3 to larger post-secondary colleges that offer programmes at QF levels 5-7 and some of which have obtained Programme Area Accreditation status (partial self-accrediting status) and aspire to acquire private university title. Operators also differ in terms of accreditation track record and maturity with respect to internal quality assurance arrangements.

One of our future challenges is to provide effective and consistent quality assurance services to all operators on the one hand and, on the other hand support the continuous quality improvement to meet the varied needs of operators. It will be necessary to apply a more flexible approach to accreditation without compromising the rigour and the consistency of the accreditation process.

We have already embarked on this process. The Four-stage QA Process is developmental in nature and allows mature operators with a proven track record to apply for programme area accreditation that gives them authority to design and quality assure their own programmes in a particular area. HKCAAVQ's recent review of the Four-stage QA Process led to the introduction of the so-called facilitation phase that both provides more support to new and less mature operators at the start of the accreditation process and gives more mature operators the opportunity to apply for a focused accreditation process based on their track record.

In the next decade Hong Kong will experience a substantial decline in secondary school leavers and thus in the population of potential post-secondary students from 69,600 in 2012 to 43,700 in 2022. This situation will increase competition among the institutions offering programmes at QF
levels 4-7 and has the potential to affect the landscape of the post-secondary education sector. It may be challenging for some of the smaller providers to remain financially viable, operators may consider alternative business models, such as offering qualifications outside Hong Kong or offering joint and dual qualifications with partners in or outside of Hong Kong, or they may consider introducing alternative delivery modes.

HKCAAVQ’s accreditation services have been available to vocational operators since 2008 and the number of operators seeking accreditation continues to increase. Given that the majority of vocational operators have less experience with accreditation and quality assurance our efforts in this sector continue to focus on the development of a quality culture intended to empower operators to design robust curricula meeting the requirements of the HKQF standards and on the development of effective assessment for work-based learning and competency-based learning.

It will be important to monitor the developments in the vocational as well as post-secondary sector to ensure that our accreditation approach addresses these emerging issues without compromising quality and stifling innovation.

**Support to the HKQF**

The aim of the HKQF is to clearly define the standards of different qualifications, ensure their quality and indicate the articulation pathways between different levels of qualifications to facilitate mobility. HKCAAVQ’s role as the accreditation authority is critical in the promotion and further development of the HKQF and we have to ensure that our quality assurance approach reflects the policy developments and new requirements introduced for operators. Since the launch of the HKQF the Education Bureau has continued to expand and improve the QF policy. Over the last few years HKCAAVQ has integrated such developments into its accreditation processes, e.g. the Credit Accumulation and Transfer policy (CAT), the Award Titles Scheme (ATS), Use of QF credit and graduate profiles related to post-secondary programmes that will be mandatory for degree programmes from 2016. The HKQF will continue to evolve and so will the expectation that the quality assurance approach will be able to effectively support the improvement of the quality of the recognised qualifications.
Training for Capacity Building

Our accreditation approach is based on four principles one of which is peer review. This means that we engage experts to form panels that conduct the assessment of operators and their programmes and formulate recommendations that inform our accreditation decisions. Since the launch of the HKQF in 2008 our Research and Training team has been responsible for offering regular training sessions for operators and experts. It is of critical importance that the experts we engage are up-to-date with developments in quality assurance and the education sectors in which they work. With the pace of development the level of training activity will be upheld in the future while the Research and Training team will focus on developing new and more effective approaches to training and briefing our experts.

Non-local Programmes

The Hong Kong Government introduced legislation regulating non-local operators wanting to offer programmes in Hong Kong in 1997. All non-local operators are required to register, unless they are exempted from registration with the Education Bureau to legally operate in Hong Kong. There are currently approximately 1,200 non-local programmes being offered in Hong Kong. Since the introduction of the HKQF we have offered our accreditation services to non-local programmes that if accredited will enjoy a similar status to locally-accredited programmes, and their qualifications will be recognised under the HKQF.

The interest from non-local programmes to seek accreditation has grown over the last five years and we anticipate that the interest will continue to grow in the years to come. This particular accreditation service, in addition to the standards and criteria that apply to local programmes, also assesses the quality of the partners' collaboration and the effectiveness of the partnership. The non-local operators are normally also accredited. We will work with these partnerships and the relevant non-local quality assurance agencies to explore how we can possibly collaborate on the accreditation processes in future.

Qualifications Assessment

An aspect of the expansion of transnational education that is a sign of a high level of international student mobility is the ever increasing number of qualifications assessment applications received by HKCAAVQ. The
applications are submitted by local as well as non-local individuals who possess non-local qualifications that they want to be assessed against the Hong Kong education system in order to pursue further education in Hong Kong or seek employment. The approach to qualifications assessment was revised in 2008 with the launch of the HKQF to reflect the outcomes-based approach to higher education. We will continue to invest considerable efforts in ensuring that our approach reflects the international developments in qualifications recognition and strengthen links between our accreditation and qualifications assessment processes.

**Closing Remarks**

The primary responsibility for quality assurance and continuous improvement rests with operators. External quality assurance is not an end in itself, but on the one hand a means to provide, in particular, to students, parents and employers assurance that accredited operators and their programmes meet threshold standards, and on the other hand a means to support the continued improvement efforts of operators. It requires dialogue and consultation with operators and other relevant stakeholder to ensure that the quality assurance approach works to meet its objectives. In that context stakeholder engagement, including but not limited to consultation about policy and process changes, annual operator surveys and feedback from Panel members, will continue to be a high priority for HKCAAVQ.

HKCAAVQ looks forward to another exciting 25 years.
Part II

Future Directions of Quality Assurance from a Global Perspective
Chapter 1

Australia
Introduction of TEQSA

TEQSA was established by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act in October 2011 to assure the quality of Australia's higher education sector. The Australian higher education system comprises both public and private universities, Australian branches of overseas universities, and other higher education providers with and without self-accrediting authority.

TEQSA registers and evaluates the performance of higher education providers against the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards), which all providers must meet in order to enter and remain within Australia's higher education system. TEQSA undertakes registration/re-registration assessments and course accreditation/re-accreditation for providers without self-accrediting authority. As at May 2015 the National Register lists 173 Registered Providers and 1,086 Accredited Courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provider Category</th>
<th>SAA</th>
<th>Non-SAA</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian University</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian University of Specialisation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas University</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Provider</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>48</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td><strong>173</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In carrying out its role, TEQSA's approach is underpinned by the three principles of proportionality, necessity and risk. These in effect require that TEQSA's exercise of power must differentiate between providers that have extensive positive track records and low risk of future non-compliance with the Threshold Standards, and those that have poor or limited track records and a substantial risk of future non-compliance under the Standards. TEQSA must also ensure that any exercise of its powers is proportionate to any actual non-compliance or risk of future non-compliance.
TEQSA places a significant emphasis on promoting and facilitating a culture of effective self-assurance by providers.

**Future Direction and Challenges of Quality Assurance**

TEQSA's mission, as set out in its Strategic Plan, is to safeguard student and provider interests by assuring the quality of Australian higher education through a proportionate risk-based approach, which allows higher education providers to pursue their individual missions and encourages diversity, innovation and excellence\(^1\).

TEQSA collects information from higher education providers through an annual Provider Information Request (PIR) and undertakes an annual cycle of risk assessments of all providers following the completion of the PIR and acquisition of data from existing annual national collections where available. Risk indicators have been identified giving consideration to data availability, applicability across the sector and to different provider circumstances. A combination of input and output/outcome indicators are used, recognising that relying solely on output/outcome indicators would mean a focus on the detection of confirmed failure, but not prevention. A combination of indicators also provides a more holistic view of a provider's operations noting the limitations of individual indicators. In assessing risk indicators, TEQSA considers a set of risk thresholds, while taking into account provider context and risk controls.

TEQSA's approach to its work has continued to evolve since the Agency's inception, taking into account the views of government and feedback from the sector and other stakeholders.

With a view to reducing the regulatory burden on providers and enabling them to focus on their core business of education, TEQSA has designed its approach and processes to allow it to make nuanced judgements on the scope and depth of monitoring and assessment activities and, based on

assessment, the nature of regulatory action that may be taken if any. That is, a consistent framework is applied for the whole sector, and it is the application of that framework which results in differential treatment of providers. This has been underpinned by the view that providers in all Provider Categories (defined in the Act) may present substantive risk and conversely that providers in any provider category may be well placed to meet or exceed the standards. It enables a highly tailored approach, regardless of provider category. TEQSA’s case managers play an important role in this tailoring.

In practice, what this means is that any provider that has:

- a strong record of delivery of higher education;
- sound financial standing;
- no history of non-compliance with the Standards; and
- a low risk of future non-compliance with the Standards,

can expect an engagement with TEQSA that is tailored to reflect that context and therefore involves a lower burden of providing evidence of compliance with the standards.

Conversely, a provider that has:

- a limited or no record of delivery of quality higher education; and/or
- weak financial standing; and/or
- a history of non-compliance; and/or
- a high risk of future non-compliance with the Standards,

can expect an engagement with TEQSA that is appropriately amplified to provide a greater level of assurance that the provider continues to meet the Standards.

For providers that are applying for initial registration, TEQSA will always undertake an assessment against the full range of Threshold Standards.

As part of the evolving nature of TEQSA’s approach, the Agency promotes and facilitates a culture of effective internal self-assurance by providers. This approach includes:

- allocating case managers to every provider to maintain communication
and cooperation with providers and, where necessary, advise them about effective self-assurance practices

- providing guidance about our processes and sharing our insights and experiences about achieving and maintaining effective self-assurance
- engaging with all providers on our annual risk assessments, where we identify significant risks to students and/or risks to financial viability and sustainability, and
- consulting and working with peak bodies in the sector about our approach and receiving their feedback and their members' perspectives.

Over the last 30 years, the Australian higher education sector has undergone substantial transformation, influenced externally and from within. The sector is now substantially larger, more complex, diverse and dynamic with an increasing focus on international provision. A number of more recent developments, including the growth in on-line provision, off-shore activity, partnership arrangements, innovative delivery models and the introduction of new business and operating models, has led TEQSA to investigate ways to further target its activity through a more sophisticated application of its risk assessment framework. Such an approach in the future may include:

- enhanced monitoring through a compliance monitoring strategy rather than a focus on cyclical regulatory assessment processes;
- a risk differentiation framework to define the level of regulatory focus on each provider in a consistent and structured way; with
- targeted interventions and graduated responses to address risks and manage non-compliance (based on and proportionate to risk and/or evidence of non-compliance); and
- expanded education and guidance to support self-assurance activities within the sector.

The robustness of the approach would be underpinned by TEQSA’s understanding of the sector and providers, accumulated through cyclical risk assessments and regulatory processes, and from intelligence such as media and complaints, and general dealings between the Agency and providers. Whilst building on the direction already taken within TEQSA, such a development would require close consultation with key stakeholders, including government and higher education providers, before any implementation could commence.
Chapter 2

Dubai
**Contributor:**

Dr Warren Fox, Chief of Higher Education, Universities & Colleges Agency; and Mr. Nitesh Suhrnan, Quality Assurance Manager, Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA)

---

**Introduction of KHDA**

KHDA is responsible for the growth and quality of private education in Dubai. We support schools, universities, parents, students, educators, investors and government partners to create a high quality education sector focused on happiness and wellbeing.

Our work is guided by the strategy of the Government of Dubai and inspired by those responsible for Dubai's future growth and innovation – our students. Our publications\(^1\), along with detailed school inspection reports\(^2\), provide evidence-based information for everyone involved in education.

**Our Vision**

Lifelong learning to fulfill Dubai's aspirations.

**Our Mission**

To assure quality and to improve accessibility to education, learning and human development, with the engagement of the community.

---

**Future Direction and Challenges of Quality Assurance**

**Abstract**

Transnational higher education has witnessed tremendous growth over the last decade (OBHE, 2012). Branch campuses from universities around the world are now offering programmes in countries across Asia, the Middle East, and other developing regions.

---

In 2012, the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education reported a total of 200 International Branch Campuses (IBC) around the world. The United Arab Emirates has the most IBCs in a single country (37), with home campuses in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. Twenty-six of these IBCs are located in Dubai (OBHE, 2012), and attract students from neighboring Gulf countries, the Asian subcontinent and parts of Africa.

In 2008, Dubai's private education regulator, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), established an independent board of higher education experts from around the world to carry out external quality assurance for IBCs in Dubai's free zones. The University Quality Assurance International Board (UQAIB) is a fit-for-purpose and innovative approach to quality assurance developed to meet Dubai's unique needs.

This model of quality assurance is known as the Equivalency Validation Model (EVM), which relies on the home campus' own external quality assurance and accreditation processes. The EVM also requires that home campuses directly manage all academic and operational facets of the branch campus.

In 2014, KHDA launched the Quality beyond Boundaries; an initiative designed to bring together the main countries involved in transnational education, to explore areas for collaboration and partnership, and to make more of what's working in transnational education.

Introduction

Higher education institutions in Dubai are growing steadily. Currently, nearly 60,000 students are enrolled in more than 500 programmes (KHDA, 2015). Through its position as a trading hub, Dubai has a long history of welcoming people from all over the world, a tradition being continued by its universities. Dubai's students come from more than 80 different nationalities, living and working alongside others who will become part of their global network as they move into the workplace. We believe that Dubai offers an excellent environment in which to receive an education at undergraduate and postgraduate level, while also gaining experience of life and work in the Middle East.
**Higher Education Landscape**

There are 57 institutions in Dubai that offer higher education programmes, and they are grouped into three categories: federal institutions, international branch campuses, and local institutions. Catering mainly to Emirati students, the three federal institutions offer a range of diplomas, higher diplomas, bachelor and master's degrees.

The majority of Dubai's 26 international universities are located within Free Zone areas such as Dubai International Academic City and Dubai Knowledge Village. Other Free Zones attract institutions aimed at a particular industry, such as medical colleges in Dubai Healthcare City, or business colleges in Dubai International Financial Centre. Dubai hosts 2 vocational colleges offering international diplomas, while the remaining 25 institutions are private local universities and colleges.

All in all, international universities in Dubai have home campuses from 10 different countries: UK, USA, Australia, India, Iran, France, Pakistan, Ireland, Lebanon and Russia.

**Free Zones for Economic Growth and Development**

Dubai established Free Zones to attract international investment and economic growth in many sectors, including higher education.

Dubai Knowledge Village, the first Free Zone to house educational institutions, was opened in 2003. In its first year of operation it attracted eight higher education institutions, some of which had previously been operating outside the Free Zone. As Knowledge Village grew, the need for an additional education Free Zone became apparent. In 2005, Dubai International Academic City (DIAC) was established to house educational institutions offering degree programmes. During this time, the Government of Dubai also established Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) and Dubai Healthcare City (DHCC). These purpose-built environments have attracted a variety of institutions and international programmes to Dubai in a short period.

Today there are eight Free Zones in Dubai with higher education institutions across several different sectors. Since Knowledge Village was established in 2003, the number of higher educational institutions in Dubai has increased by 77%.
Growth of Higher Education in Dubai

**Student Diversity**

Nearly 60,000 full-time and part-time students were enrolled at higher education institutions in Dubai in the 2014/15 academic year. There are slightly more male (56%) than female students (44%).

Many universities are fairly small and specialized, but several have more than 3,000 students.

The Dubai Government and KHDA aim to increase the number of Emirati students enrolled at universities in Dubai. Emirati students, the majority of whom attend federal institutions, make up 43% of all higher education students.

**Total student enrolment in Dubai (2008 – 2014)**
**Academic Programmes in Dubai**

More than 500 academic programmes are offered in Dubai, ranging from diplomas to doctorates. The majority of programmes are in Business, which include Management, Islamic Finance and Logistics. There are also many programmes in IT, Engineering and Media and Design. The majority of programmes (60%) are at Bachelor's level, and a further 36% are Master's degrees. PhD programs are available in Business, Education and Engineering.

Looking ahead, the plan is to attract a range of institutions to offer:

- a greater variety of programmes and;
- more academic research opportunities

These steps will help to cater for the various needs of Dubai’s growing multicultural population and address its education needs for the future.
**Regulation and Quality Assurance**

The development of a world-class higher education system is of great importance to Dubai and to the United Arab Emirates. Within Dubai, there are two ways in which quality in higher education is assured. Institutions in Free Zones are licensed by KHDA through its Quality Assurance scheme; alternatively, institutions can apply to the UAE Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research for accreditation through the Commission for Academic Accreditation.

Dubai is emerging as an educational hub. To continue attracting high calibre students and faculty, our universities and colleges must be able to compete on the world stage.

**University Quality Assurance International Board (UQAIB)**

The University Quality Assurance International Board (UQAIB)\(^3\) was established by KHDA to assure the quality of education at the Free Zone institutions. UQAIB is made up of experts from around the world. It uses an equivalency model to ensure that the academic programme being delivered in Dubai is the same accredited programme that is being provided at the home campus of the institution. All Higher Education institutions located in Dubai’s Free Zones must undergo the UQAIB quality assurance process. This process complements the accreditation body known as the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) which is part of the Federal Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research which licenses and accredits all Higher Education institutions outside the free zones.

**Equivalency Validation Model**

UQAIB carries out external quality assurance to independently determine that the standards of a higher education provider (HEP) are acceptable. Importantly, the quality of the branch campus or programme in a Dubai Free Zone must be equivalent to its home campus.

---

\(^3\) UQAIB Quality Assurance Manual, Version 2.0 December 2013: 
http://www.khda.gov.ae/CMS/WebParts/TextEditor/Documents/UQAIB\_EN.pdf
This is known as the **Equivalency Validation Model**. UQAIB considers the quality of the branch providers' activities based on three key elements:

- The Home campus of the HEP and its programmes must be accredited and recognised by the official higher education system in that country.
- The standards used at the home country to achieve the above must be acceptable to Dubai and the international higher education community.
- There must be evidence that the quality of a HEP Branch and its programs are equivalent with its Home HEP and programs. Such evidence would preferably include existing cross-border quality assurance provisions from the HEP home country, wherever possible.

**Board Members**

The twelve board members of UQAIB have experience in quality assurance, transnational higher education and accreditation as well as senior academic experience at higher education institutions. They are from the USA, UK, Australia, New Zealand, India, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, UAE, France, Malaysia and Kenya.

The Board travels to Dubai at least twice a year to meet and review all new and renewal applications for Educational Services Permits. During these visits the Board conducts on-site investigations to see how the standards of the Home HEP are being maintained at the Branch in Dubai. The Board may request further information from the HEP.

Twenty institutions are reviewed by UQAIB. These institutions offer international programmes that are accredited by the quality agency of their home countries and may also have programme accreditation from external professional bodies.

**Partnership and Collaboration: Quality Beyond Boundaries (QBB)**

*Quality beyond Boundaries* is a KHDA initiative aimed at addressing the challenges and opportunities associated with the growing internationalisation of higher education, as well as the benefits of international cooperation in quality assurance. QBB brings together senior leaders of quality assurance agencies of some of the main sending and receiving countries of transnational education. These include:
Future Directions of Quality Assurance: Perspectives from 10 Agencies

- Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) of Dubai
- Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) of the UK
- The Council for Private Education (CPE) from Singapore
- Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ)
- Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA)
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) - Australia
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) – United States
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC) - United States

Policies and practices of quality assurance agencies are diverse, and are often adapted to the national and cultural landscape of that agency. QBB is a vehicle to address common challenges and to work together productively. Emerging cross border challenges of student mobility and degree recognition, data provision for informed decision making, and increased international outreach while safeguarding quality are some of the topics discussed by this innovative group.

QBB has had three meetings, an inaugural meeting in Dubai in March 2014, followed by its second meeting in London in October 2014. At the second meeting, members of QBB decided to formalise the initiative and call themselves the QBB Group. In April 2015, the hub countries of the group met in Malaysia to discuss collaboration and partnership opportunities for hub countries. Dubai will host the next meeting in December 2015.

An integral outcome from this forum is to establish a common set of agreed principles for future international quality assurance agency cooperation and work to improve quality assurance in higher education within a global world – beyond national boundaries.
Chapter 3

Ireland
Contributor:
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

Introduction of QQI

QQI is a state agency established by the Quality Assurance and Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 2012\(^1\) with a board appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills.

Our functions include those previously carried out by the Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC); the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC); the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI).

In the area of qualifications, we are responsible for maintaining the ten-level NQF (National Framework of Qualifications)\(^2\).

We are also an awarding body and set standards for awards we make in the NFQ.

We validate education and training programmes and make extensive awards in the Further Education and Training sector including in the Education and Training Boards.

We also make awards in Higher Education mainly to learners in private providers. The universities and institutes of technology largely make their own awards.

We also provide advice on recognition of foreign qualifications in Ireland and on the recognition of Irish qualifications abroad.

---

\(^1\) [http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Qualifications%20and%20Quality%20Assurance%20Act%202012.pdf](http://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Qualifications%20and%20Quality%20Assurance%20Act%202012.pdf)

In the area of quality assurance, we are responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of quality assurance in further and higher education providers in Ireland.

We publish the outcomes of these external reviews on our website www.QQI.ie.

QQI is a member of ENQA and listed on EQAR.

**Future Direction and Challenges of Quality Assurance**

Ireland's population of 4.6 million is growing. The numbers leaving school will continue to increase between now and 2030. Our age cohort participation rate in higher education is currently 56% and the national strategy for higher education sees that rising to 60%. Labour market demand is also projected to continue to grow, with annual demand projected at 20,000 new graduate jobs over the coming 8 years. The Irish higher and further education system has already absorbed significantly increased numbers in recent years even as the public funding available has declined as a consequence of the economic and fiscal crisis that began in 2008.

The well-established quality assurance system in Irish higher education must respond to the challenge of growing numbers while dealing with declining public funds per student. If a national expert group on the future funding of higher education recommends increased private participation either in the funding of education (e.g. through fees or loans) and/or private provision of post-secondary education then the quality assurance system will have to respond to these changes also and the pressures that they impose on education and training providers.

Over the past 20 years Ireland has operated on the basis of the emergent European model that places a strong emphasis on institutional autonomy. This assigns primary responsibility for quality assurance to the institution. The external agency, QQI, is responsible for ensuring the effectiveness of these internal quality assurance arrangements through external monitoring and review. Higher education providers have been familiar with this emphasis since the 1997 Universities Act but it is a new emphasis for the sixteen recently restructured Education and Training Boards which are responsible for publicly funded further education and training.
Since the creation of QQI as a unitary agency in 2012 one challenge has been to accommodate the diversity of the providers which we quality assure. On the one hand there is a gatekeeper or threshold quality function to examine new entrants into the system. On the other hand there is a risk of imposing repetitive, bureaucratic, accountability processes on well-functioning providers which divert resources away from activities either within or outside the institutions that could be devoted to actually improving quality.

A recent 2014 review of review methods used by the former agencies in Ireland, conducted by an independent international panel, presented a series of models that could be used in future reviews. The choice of model hinges on the purpose to the review which might focus on accountability or enhancement or attempt to address both in a comprehensive package. QQI is currently consulting on a comprehensive model. Which method is ultimately adopted will be guided by the independent panel's helpful identification of desirable and undesirable characteristics of reviews, based not just on the varied Irish experience of institutional reviews but also on experience in other countries.

Alongside the review of providers as institutions QQI external quality role in respect of programmes also faces some challenges. Public higher education institutions (universities and institutes of technology) are self-validating but QQI is responsible for validating programmes in private higher education institution and in further education and training providers. The method used in higher education is quite intensive with a separate independent 4-5 person panel visiting the institution for each new programme approval. As the numbers of programmes continues to grow it is challenging not simply at a logistical level but also to find and train the appropriate disciplinary expert reviewers. One development that may ameliorate this challenge is the possibility, introduced in the 2012 Act that private providers could also seek self-validating status through the delegation of degree awarding powers from QQI. The criteria and conditions associated with such delegation would have to ensure that the reputation of the Irish degrees was maintained.

In the area of further education and training the validation of programmes leading to national awards has been largely a paper based exercise. Some commentary, including in the first national further education and training strategy in 2014, has questioned whether the resultant qualifications are robust enough to meet the needs either of the labour market or of further
academic progression. The challenge is to develop a validation methodology that is sufficiently robust to maintain programme adherence with national standards both in pedagogy and particularly in assessment, while at the same time allowing providers to be response to local learner and labour market requirements, and all within the severe resource constraints imposed on the whole system.

One of the raisons d'etre of QQI as an independent quality agency is to ensure that the interests of learners within the education and training system are not subordinated to the interests of the providers that make up the system. Our new strategy statement covering the period 2015-2018 sets out three key modes of activity for QQI. These are regulation, improvement and provision of information. QQI has restructured itself internally to meet the sometimes contradictory expectations imposed on it. Some of QQI's functions are quite authoritative and regulatory in nature – approving new providers, validating programmes, delegating awarding powers, as well as withdrawing any of these statuses if the provider does not continue meet the conditions imposed. The review function, which encompassing ongoing accountability, is more oriented towards the improvement of education and training. QQI will engage in other activities to encourage betterment in the system. The third pillar is the provision of definitive authoritative information about providers, programme and qualifications that can be relied upon, not just by current and prospective learners but by employers, public authorities, and other interested parties at home and abroad.
Introduction of NIAD-UE

NIAD-UE is playing a leading role in enhancing the quality of higher education institutions in Japan through the following activities:

1. Evaluation and accreditation of higher education
   
   NIAD-UE conducts the following three types of evaluation and accreditation:
   
   • Evaluations of education and research activities of higher education institutions [Compulsory]
     - Certified Evaluation and Accreditation (CEA)
   
   • Assessment of education and research activities of national university corporations [Compulsory]
     - National University Corporation Evaluation
   
   • Thematic assessments on distinctive features of institutions [Voluntary]
     - Research Activities
     - Community Engagement
     - Internationalization of Higher Education

2. Awarding academic degrees
   
   NIAD-UE provides an alternative route to earn academic degrees (bachelor's, master's, doctorate) for individuals by assessing their learning outcomes.

3. Collaborations in quality assurance
   
   NIAD-UE establishes partnership and collaboration with universities and quality assurance institutions, both within Japan and overseas, in order to collect and disseminate relevant information, and to develop and provide quality assurance project such as a training for IQA (internal quality assurance).
4. Research activities on quality assurance in higher education

NIAD-UE carries out researches on evaluation and accreditation, awarding academic degrees, and collaboration in QA for higher education. Those researches contribute to improve the quality of higher education in Japan as well as NIAD-UE's works.

**Future Direction and Challenges of Quality Assurance**

The challenges and direction of quality assurance in higher education in Japan can be divided into domestic affairs such as internal quality assurance (IQA) and issues that arise from the internationalization of higher education, including quality assurance in transnational education.

An apparent issue in quality assurance in Japan is the enhancement of IQA. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are required to accumulate information on education and research on their own and conduct self-assessments for the maintenance and improvement of their quality. A sustainable IQA system is wanted for promoting QA of HEIs in Japan.

As attention in education comes to focus on student competences, learning outcomes and their measurement have become more multifaceted and approaches and methods of QA have become current controversial topics.

A review of NIAD-UE's Certified Evaluation and Accreditation (CEA) has revealed the accountability of HEIs to society and stakeholders to be an issue. NIAD-UE periodically conducts a review of CEA, which has three fundamental objectives: assuring the quality of HEIs' activities; contributing to quality improvement of HEIs; and encouraging universities to gain public understanding. According to our review, although CEA has played a significant role in the quality improvement of higher education institutions, it is hard to say that CEA contributes sufficiently to HEIs' efforts to gain public understanding and support. Since HEIs have an extremely diverse range of stakeholders, such as students and their families, industry, academic and administrative staff, university managers, and among others, there are various scopes and scales of quality recognized by each stakeholder. Even policy planners could be stakeholders, as higher education policies are necessary for the management of HEIs. Even though CEA reports and self-assessment
reports are disclosed to the public, it will be necessary to consider measures to acquire public understanding of HEIs' status as institutions that serve the public good. Recently, NIAD-UE and other higher education authorities have begun operating the website *Japanese College and University Portraits* as a way to help enhance the accountability of universities and colleges. The aim of the website is to broadly supply information on HEIs' education. We also plan to publish the information in English with a view toward providing overseas' stakeholders with easy access to information on Japanese HEIs in terms of international student mobility.

The review also uncovered a chronic challenge for QA agencies, namely, the need to reduce the burden on assessors and HEIs in dealing with many kinds of evaluation activities.

To solve these issues, NIAD-UE will keep up with QA trends and practices abroad, hoping to find clues for facilitating the maturation of quality assurance.

Internationalization of HE has brought increasing difficulties for quality and its assurance. As cross boarder higher education grows, QA systems need to become more comprehensible and comparable in a global context. It is essential to have a good understanding of different higher education and QA systems. Accordingly, not only universities themselves but also a QA authorities should take a leading role in providing appropriate quality information, in order to gain international confidence. NIAD-UE therefore publishes online booklets such as *Glossary of Quality Assurance in Japanese Higher Education* and *Overview of the Quality Assurance System of Higher Education*, for better understanding of the QA system in Japan and other countries and regions. In collaborative activities among QA agencies for promoting international comparability, NIAD-UE has initiated dialogues with QA agencies from ASEAN Plus Three countries (Japan, China, and Korea) and is exchanging and sharing views on QA development in the area of programs of student exchange and student mobility in the region.

There are two notable concerns in addition to confidence in quality and quality assurance systems. One is quality assurance in transnational education, and the other is the validity of qualifications.
The CAMPUS Asia QA project is a cross-border collaboration among QA agencies to enhance quality assurance in transnational programs. In this project, NIAD-UE, Higher Education Evaluation Center (HEEC) of China, and Korean Council for University Education (KCUE) are undertaking joint monitoring of the pilot programs with the goal of producing joint QA guidelines for international quality assurance among the three countries. The monitoring process is being carried out in two phases over five years. The first monitoring was implemented in 2013 in the three countries separately. The three QA bodies will conduct the second monitoring jointly in 2015.

The assurance of validity of degrees/qualifications, including of students' abilities, achievements, knowledge, learning outcomes, skills, and such like, is also a primary demand worldwide. NIAD-UE is conducting a research project to identify requirements of information regarding overseas and Japanese qualifications, and has carried out both national and international surveys in this regard. The surveys found that not a few Japanese HEIs are in need of a service that provides information on foreign qualifications, while some international counterparts have difficulties understanding Japanese qualifications. Although the project is ongoing, the question of how to handle various qualifications in terms of authenticity and quality at the time of admissions employment, and others, will be a continuous subject of discussion in Japan.

It is obvious that QA agencies have an important role to play in the further development of higher education with quality assurance, and they should maintain close relationships to address common challenges and international issues in the coming decades. NIAD-UE will continue to cooperate with our longtime partner HKCAAVQ and other QA bodies abroad, especially those in the East Asian region, in order to promote quality improvement and establish mutual understanding and confidence within the international community.
Chapter 5

Malaysia
**Introduction of MQA**

The MQA's main role is to implement the 'Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF)'. The MQF acts as a basis for quality assurance of higher education and as the reference point for the criteria and standards for national qualifications. The MQA is responsible for monitoring and overseeing the quality assurance practices and accreditation of national higher education for both public and private higher education institutions. The MQA's vision of becoming a global authority on quality assurance of higher education and its mission of putting in place a system of quality assurance that is recognised internationally inspire MQA to chart new boundaries in quality assurance of higher education.

MQA works closely with relevant stakeholders in developing standards, guidelines and all other relevant instruments as national references for the conferment of qualifications. It quality assures higher education programmes and institutions by ensuring fulfilment to the set criteria and standards through its accreditation exercise. MQA plays a vital role in facilitating recognition and articulation of qualifications. It maintains the 'Malaysian Qualifications Register (MQR)' which provides information on accredited programmes.

MQA makes its presence internationally through its bilateral and multilateral's engagement with other quality assurance bodies and international networks.

**Future Direction and Challenges of Quality Assurance**

**Challenges**

MQA's significance in the field of quality assurance has successfully placed itself in a position where it is well recognized and becoming a source of reference nationally and internationally. However, the challenges facing higher education in the aspect of quality assurance is relatively huge, complicated at times and uncompromised.
The growth of higher education institutions with a wide spread of programmes and diversity of fields is phenomenal. This denotes an increasing number of applications for accreditation. MQA's readiness in terms of the compatibility of its system, sufficient financial resources and skilled human capital is crucial to provide full support to the quality assurance processes. With the inclusion of cross-border higher education, it demands for more complicated and challenging quality assurance procedures and outcomes.

The readiness of Malaysian higher education providers (HEP) to support and practice their own quality assurance measures is another challenging factor. This effort demands courage, support from the management and cooperation from all team members including students. As an external quality assurance agency, MQA has been very consistent in encouraging the HEPs to exercise quality control, internal quality assurance and enhancement in the offering of academic programmes. Through the establishment of a department or unit which can take control of the quality assurance agenda, most of the processes involved can be efficiently facilitated and intelligently managed.

Upon gaining support from the Malaysian HEPs, MQA is never reluctant in ascertaining its accountability in quality assurance of higher education by providing guidance and showing possible ways to good quality assurance exercise. MQA strives for the enhancement of quality assurance mechanisms and processes through developing standards documents and guidelines. MQA takes the opportunities to involve all relevant stakeholders in the development. The approved documents are made public through the website and are accessible without incurring any fee or payment. Other than that, ongoing consultation sessions are made available to the relevant crowd. MQA is determined in educating public on quality assurance despite its challenging nature.

Obtaining and maintaining a pool of sufficient, capable, skilled, ethical and professional quality assurance assessors and auditors are other challenging tasks that MQA is currently experiencing. These part-timers are experts from academia and industry who are appointed to be part of the team involved in accreditation of programmes and institutions in Malaysia. Due to the nature of the appointment and their devotion to the full-time job, it is sometimes tough to receive their full commitment. To enable the precise identification of academician for the specific field of study, MQA plays a major role in the selection process. Having to satisfy the requirement of aligning the content
of the curriculum to the needs of the industry, MQA works closely with the industry to educate and attract the right industry players to be involved in the quality assurance of higher education. MQA provides scheduled training to equip them with required knowledge and skills. Utilizing the advantages of the existing Memorandum of Understanding between MQA and other quality assurance agencies in other countries, MQA is starting to explore the idea of experts' sharing by inviting the international experts to be involved in our local auditing exercise.

Recognizing and accepting individuals with non-formal qualifications into an academic sector and allowing them to pursue further education are the challenges taken up by MQA. Today, MQA is proud to announce the new pathway of learning through the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). This is an achievement by the Malaysian government to prove that learning never stops. Despite the ready-to-use evaluation tools on the candidates applied, MQA is the party responsible in ensuring that the process is conducted as prescribed.

MQA believes that quality assurance is a national agenda. Besides gaining public's confidence towards Malaysian education system and qualifications, MQA desires to obtain international confidence in the quality of academic programmes available in the country by ensuring that the tertiary education provided is parallel to that of the international players. MQA looks forward to establish mutual understanding in quality assurance procedures and systems with other countries. Thus, MQA reaches out for networking with international quality assurance bodies to build rapport and trust through its involvement in comparability exercise on quality assurance processes and outcomes which determines the quality assurance decision of both agencies. MQA values and is fully aware on the importance of recognition which will eventually facilitate credit transfer and exemption, as well as the mobility of students within the countries involved.

**Future Directions**

MQA's establishment and the implementation of the MQF benefit Malaysia's higher education and contribute to the development of human capital. Despite maintaining its national competitiveness, MQA strives in encouraging and educating the society on the importance of assuring quality. This is in tandem with the Malaysian aspiration of becoming the centre of higher education
excellence and a source of reference within and beyond the region as well as between Islamic countries.

MQA aims to enhance the quality assurance system of higher education providers while addressing the autonomy and accountability of the institutions. MQA continues to promote and enhance community understanding of quality assurance policies and practices especially to the educational industry and other key stakeholders. It is a shared responsibility between the MQA as a quality assurance body and the higher education providers in order to effectively enhance quality of higher education through good quality assurance practices. Besides, initiatives are taken to further enhance the MQF in terms of its contents and relevancy to the subscribers. MQA is also looking forward to refresh and enhance the evaluation system on quality assurance of programmes while continuing to strengthen the expertise and professionalism of the appointed assessors and auditors.

MQA also intends to strengthen the implementation of the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) which was introduced in 2011. APEL is an approach of a systematic process involving the identification, documentation and assessment of prior experiential learning to determine the extent to which an individual has achieved the desired learning outcomes, for access to a programme of study and/or award of credits. MQA recognises APEL as an opportunity for individual with working experience but lack of formal academic qualifications to pursue their studies in higher education institutions. Serving as an 'alternative' entry route and a means of gaining credit within formal programmes of study, APEL encourages learners to continue upgrading their skills and knowledge through structured education and training, leading towards formal qualifications and better employment outcomes.

With an aspiration to produce skilled human capital, MQA and relevant bodies are working towards transforming TVET education to accommodate industry's demand. One of the strategies involves strengthening the governance of TVET for better management. This will include establishing a single system for accreditation to replace the previous dual system implemented by two different accrediting bodies to facilitate better coordination and monitoring of the TVET sector. The new system will accredit TVET programmes offered by all public and private institutions which will eventually allow mobility of students between and among all TVET institutions. Other than that, aligning
and enhancing the delivery of TVET education are important. It is an ongoing initiative to rationalise the programme offerings by TVET institutions to eliminate overlapping and enhance specialisation. Widening public access to quality TVET education is able to produce skilled labour for the industry and changes public perception towards TVET providing a pathway for profession.

MQA is determined to cooperate and collaborate with other countries within and beyond the region in terms of its contribution to the quality assurance agenda. MQA will continue to share and participate in activities involving the sharing of expertise as well as the staff capacity building. MQA will continue working on its visibility in the global quality assurance arena by attending and presenting views and findings in international events.
Chapter 6

New Zealand
Contributor:
Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA)

Introduction of AQA

The Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA), formerly known as the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit, was established by the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors’ Committee in 1994 to carry out audits of the processes in universities which underpin academic quality. AQA is funded by the universities, but is operationally independent and overseen by a governing Board.

AQA’s mission is to contribute to New Zealand university education by engaging as a leader and advocate in the development of universities based on high quality, internationally acceptable, academic practices, and by providing quality assurance and enhancement services which assist in facilitating excellent student experience and learning outcomes.

AQA has, to date, conducted four complete cycles of institutional audit and is midway through Cycle 5 (2013-2016). The Cycle 5 audit framework covers activities and quality assurance processes which might be expected as fundamental in a contemporary university of good standing. The framework articulates these expectations in a series of guideline statements. AQA auditors are most commonly senior academics or professionals experienced in quality assurance who have been trained as academic auditors either by AQA or by another quality assurance body. All New Zealand audit panels include at least one overseas auditor.

AQA academic audits have a quality enhancement as well as a quality assurance purpose. Audit reports include commendations which identify good practices; these might in turn be an impetus for ongoing enhancement. Post-audit cycle summaries bring together common themes and good practice examples from each audit cycle. AQA also produces regular newsletters and facilitates workshops and meetings for university staff involved in academic quality management.
Future Direction and Challenges of Quality Assurance

Around the world we have seen many examples of change in the higher education quality assurance and regulation landscape over the past few years. Most countries look certain to go through more upheaval in the years ahead. In New Zealand, AQA has been paying close attention to international reforms while making small adjustments to our own existing systems.

Regardless of the specific details of the mechanisms chosen by jurisdictions for external quality oversight, they all can be placed in an international context characterised by increased diversity and a rapid pace of change: changes in government, taxpayer and student expectations of institutions; changes that impact on the curriculum and teaching methods and resources, such as new technologies and their usage; and changes in the ways in which students and employers interact with education as a global experience open to international benchmarks and no longer necessarily confined by national boundaries. In New Zealand we are exploring what such changes mean in terms of assuring the quality of higher education. How can we balance demands for public accountability against institutional, staff and student autonomy? And is it even possible to assess and assure what is being done against national and international expectations that are constantly shifting?

Fundamentally, the core responsibility for ensuring the quality of universities lies with higher education institutions themselves. Only those undertaking teaching, interacting with students on a regular basis, resourcing the classrooms, the libraries and the laboratories, liaising with employers and professional bodies, and thinking about academic activity day-in and day-out know what's working, what's not, when improvements need to be made and how to go about making them. Universities regularly open themselves up to peer-review; it's the bedrock of the university academic model prevalent in countries like New Zealand and it's the best way to continue to see quality maintained and improved. It's a system that respects the autonomy of the institution and of individual staff, but also of students (an aspect not often talked about).

Within a quality assurance context student or learner autonomy, as a concept, is a useful reminder of the centrality of students to the teaching and learning activities of a university, and of their capacity for self-determination. It's
an even more useful concept when we’re thinking about the assurance of institutions within an environment characterised by constant change. Students are, by their very nature, transient within higher education - they may be enrolled for one year, three years, eight years, or more, but the student body is a shifting entity. By giving students a greater voice in quality assurance (both internal and external), some of the changes present in the higher education system can be brought into the quality assurance process. Reflecting the interests of students and giving them a greater role in quality assurance has been a strong focus for a number of European higher education quality assurance agencies for some time, and it’s something we are pleased to see becoming more prevalent here in New Zealand. Universities must endeavour, wherever they can, to ensure their own internal processes for quality assurance – for example, committees and workshops which address academic processes and teaching, learning and student support – are inclusive of the student voice, and the diversity of voices that encompasses.

Evolving technologies, changing discipline requirements and shifting preferences for the form and focus of higher education poses particular challenges for quality assurance. Just keeping up with what should be happening based on what was planned can be difficult for institutions, while ensuring that people, systems, curriculum and resources are adequate to keep up with what might lay ahead is difficult for both the institutions and for quality assurance agencies. In this way, fixed and overly specific standards can become quickly time-stamped and irrelevant. Instead, a risk-based approach to external quality assurance focused on quality enhancement (rather than compliance) recognises that mature institutions are already on a path of continuous improvement, and that change will occur in an environment of competing priorities for attention and resources. This is a partnership-type approach between external and internal quality assurance and, again, our European peers have led the way in this area. The Scottish QAA system is a particularly impressive example.

Just as a partnership approach is important within national boundaries, the shifting nature of education delivery and of student mobility demands greater awareness of the need for dialogue and cooperation across borders. New Zealand students no longer confine their expectations to the local institution and to the national job market. New Zealand universities no longer confine their enrolment catchment area, and technologies no longer restrict the
provision of materials and educational opportunities to people with a similar IP address location. Diversity and mobility are now core to the teaching and learning experience. What does this mean for New Zealand universities assuring the education experience and outcomes of their own offerings across different delivery methods and multiple countries? What about the educational 'standards' of students coming from similarly diverse institutions or countries wanting to be admitted for postgraduate study? Quality assurance between countries and across borders is a rapidly developing area driven by the need to provide certainty to prospective students and good outcomes for graduates. Progress is being made in areas such as the assurance of joint programmes and awards, and we are beginning to see steps being taken in the area of mutual recognition of quality assurance systems between systems. This requires communication, cooperation and a willingness to understand that the differing regulatory and assurance environments of other jurisdictions might, nevertheless, be consistent with the same principles found in one's own country. The Asia-Pacific region is well placed to be the drivers and test ground for this work.

Keeping pace with change – observing, anticipating, and choosing when and how to respond – is an ongoing challenge for all higher education institutions. Ensuring that external quality assurance keeps pace with that process, and supports rather than impedes institutions in the process, is a challenge for external quality assurance agencies which they must balance with shifting demands for accountability. At AQA we believe it's a challenge which can be aided by respect for institutions and the autonomy of their staff and students, taking a quality enhancement-type approach to oversight, and thinking and acting cooperatively to achieve the best outcomes for students and the New Zealand university sector as a whole.
**Introduction of NZQA**

NZQA's role in the education sector is to ensure that New Zealand qualifications are regarded as credible and robust, nationally and internationally, in order to help learners succeed in their chosen pathways and to contribute to New Zealand society. This means an emphasis on quality assurance.

NZQA was established as an independent Crown entity and has a statutory mandate for:

- managing the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF)
- administering the secondary school assessment system, including the National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEAs)
- setting rules for quality assurance in the tertiary education sector
- independent quality assurance of non-university tertiary education organisations
- recognising qualifications from other countries
- standard-setting for some specified unit standards.

NZQA works with other government agencies to support a diverse range of clients: learners, parents, teachers, assessors, secondary schools, tertiary education organisations, standard-setting bodies, industry, employers, regulators and international partners.

Tertiary education organisations include institutes of technology/polytechnics, government training establishments, wānanga¹, private training establishments, and industry training organisations.

NZQA is headed by a Board, appointed by New Zealand's Minister of Education.

---

¹ These are publicly-owned tertiary institutions in New Zealand that provide education in a Māori cultural and traditional context.
Future direction and challenges of Quality Assurance

Preparing today's learners for a changing future

NZQA continues to adapt to a fast-changing 21st century world, empowering a new generation of learners who want to learn on the go, anything, anywhere, anytime.

This means keeping up with emerging technologies and enabling multiple ways to access and recognise learning.

NZQA has created a beacon: 'qualify for the future world'. The beacon focuses NZQA's activities and recognises that qualifications open up a world of opportunities for learners.

NZQA has developed an innovative, flexible and robust qualifications framework and a high-trust, high-accountability quality assurance system to underpin it. This framework allows New Zealand learners to be recognised for separate learning outcomes, clusters of learning, and whole qualifications. Learners can accumulate these achievements throughout their life.

Evaluative Quality Assurance Framework

To ensure the quality of the NZQF, NZQA uses an Evaluative Quality Assurance Framework. This encourages organisations to take responsibility for the quality of their education and learner performance while assuring NZQA and Universities New Zealand that quality is being maintained. It also lets each organisation reflect and make continuous, targeted improvements.

New Zealand's quality assurance of tertiary education considers the quality of the product or education organisation and focuses on the value of the outcomes to learners and stakeholders, instead of simply a checklist of requirements.

In this way, it recognises the unique environments and characteristics of each organisation and fosters continual reflection and self-assessment in education organisations.
The evaluative principles are:

- High trust, high accountability
- Quality as a dynamic concept
- A practical focus on outcomes
- Flexibility
- Strategic and needs-based.

**Mātauranga Māori Evaluative Quality Assurance**

New Zealand is a leading country in formally recognising indigenous cultural knowledge and skills. NZQA has an evaluative quality assurance process that recognises Māori\(^2\) teaching and learning approaches: Mātauranga Māori\(^3\) Evaluative Quality Assurance (MM EQA). Education organisations can choose to use this approach.

MM EQA is a partnership between mātauranga Māori and the evaluative quality assurance approach. The emphasis is on face-to-face meetings, early engagement with clients, and sector participation in policy development, training and the actual analytical and evaluation processes.

**New Zealand education is going global**

New Zealand is reaching out to other countries and international education associations to share good practice, make connections and ease the way for learners wanting to travel overseas or learners coming from overseas.

- The New Zealand Government is working to make New Zealand's education services highly sought-after by international students, with the specific goal of doubling the annual economic value of these education services by 2030.
- New Zealand is connected through international conventions that promote quality frameworks and qualifications recognition: New Zealand is a signatory to the Lisbon Convention, intends to accede to the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention, and delivers on its Free Trade Agreement obligations on qualifications recognition cooperation with other countries, including Hong Kong.

---

2 The indigenous peoples of New Zealand.
3 Māori knowledge and skills.
- New Zealand offers a government service that recognises qualifications from other countries on a case-by-case basis.
- New Zealand assists other countries to develop and implement qualifications frameworks and associated quality assurance processes. Currently the focus is on development in the Pacific region and Asia. This includes supporting the capability of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and its member states.

**International recognition of the NZQF**

NZQA is working to give learners full domestic and global recognition of their educational achievements.

New Zealand is seeking increased international recognition of the NZQF:

- referencing the NZQF with the qualifications frameworks of key immigration partner countries and regions
- working closely with other countries to increase and promote the comparability of different international qualification frameworks
- working to have New Zealand's secondary school qualifications (the NCEAs) formally recognised by other countries.

**Transforming the NZQF**

New Zealand's third-generation qualifications framework is being transformed to remove duplicated content and become fully flexible, as well as a qualification system that meets learners' needs in a rapidly changing world.

A comprehensive review of qualifications below degree level has replaced National qualifications with more flexible New Zealand qualifications. The review reduced the number of certificates and qualifications from 4,000 to around 1,200, and enabled sectors, industries, and stakeholders to work together to agree on the qualifications needed in each area of work.

New Zealand qualifications were redesigned to allow for many different programmes to lead to the same qualification. These programmes can be designed around the needs of specific learners or groups and be delivered in multiple ways. New Zealand qualifications are now flexible enough to suit multiple settings and needs:
- delivery through online learning and emerging forms of learning (including Massive Open Online Courses);
- using digital learning and assessment; and
- training on-job or off-job or in a combination of ways.

**Embracing borderless education**

New Zealand is seeking to let people take their learning with them wherever they go. There are three key initiatives:

- the Universal Record of Achievement;
- extending Credit Recognition and Transfer (CRT) and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL); and
- offshore delivery of New Zealand qualifications.

**Universal Record of Achievement**

NZQA is developing a universal record of achievement that will recognise all quality assured learning an individual has completed in New Zealand and overseas. This will be a useful record for learners, education organisations and employers.

**Credit Recognition and Transfer and Recognition of Prior Learning**

NZQA is exploring how all quality prior learning can be recognised so it does not have to be repeated.

NZQA is working with tertiary education organisations about how they can increase their use of CRT and RPL and reduce duplication of training in skills already gained.

**Offshore delivery of New Zealand qualifications**

A large number of New Zealand tertiary education organisations deliver education to international students.
There are also a small number of New Zealand tertiary education organisations delivering New Zealand qualifications offshore.

NZQA rules ensure that the quality of programmes leading to NZQF qualifications delivered offshore are to the same standard as programmes delivered onshore, and also meet the quality assurance requirements of host countries.
Chapter 7

Singapore
Introduction of CPE

The Council for Private Education (CPE) is a statutory board established under the Ministry of Education in December 2009 to regulate the private education industry in Singapore.

The CPE administers a two-tier regulatory framework to uplift and maintain standards in the private education sector – the mandatory Enhanced Registration Framework (ERF) and the voluntary EduTrust Certification Scheme.

The ERF puts in place a set of minimum standards of corporate governance, information transparency and student protection policies that all Private Education Institutions (PEI) must meet to operate in Singapore.

EduTrust certification is awarded to PEIs that are able to demonstrate more robust systems and processes in the six specific areas of management commitment and responsibilities; corporate governance and administration; external recruitment agents; student protection and support services; academic processes and assessment of students; as well as quality assurance, monitoring and results.

Besides our role as a regulator, the CPE provides consumer education and support for students through its Student Services Centre, and conducts activities to support the strategic development of the private education industry.

Future direction and challenges of Quality Assurance

The CPE's vision is to create a trusted and well-regarded private education sector; and we do this by raising standards through effective regulation, industry development and consumer education. As we work towards our goals, we see several challenges:
Maintaining Quality Assurance Integrity

As a "host" country for transnational education, we rely on the regulatory and quality assurance frameworks in the "home" countries of providers to assure the quality of education delivered here.

The task of quality assurance is already challenging enough when looking at a single institution within one's regulatory reach; geographical distance and jurisdictional boundaries compound the difficulties of ensuring the integrity of quality assurance processes and outcomes. The challenge is made even greater as the volume and variety of delivery models of transnational education grows and evolves.

How do we ensure that providers are able to deliver and are delivering what they are supposed to deliver?

This is where international collaboration and networks between regulatory and quality assurance bodies play a crucial role. Such links allow for communication and exchange of information between regulatory and quality assurance bodies that can then better ensure quality assurance across borders. "Home" countries are then better able to protect their reputations abroad knowing that their providers are doing things right while "host" countries can be more assured of quality outcomes knowing that providers can be held accountable for their delivery in-country.

Regulating in a Way that Matters

The way in which education is delivered continues to evolve with technological developments and changing socio-economic demands and opportunities. The potential of being able to reach more students and achieve more effective outcomes with fewer resources has never been more within reach. Traditional pedagogies have been disrupted; established academic structures, funding systems and business models are being disintermediated or dismantled. All around the world, education is being reviewed and reformed.

It is impossible for regulatory and quality assurance bodies to be insulated from such changes and regulation lags behind innovation in most situations. To remain an effective regulator, we will need to ensure that we are at least trying to keep pace with such changes, both domestically and abroad. This is
where active engagement of all our stakeholders will help us keep up to date with significant trends that may impact our work.

Regulatory and quality assurance bodies will need to regularly review our policy tools and initiatives to ensure that they are relevant while reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens. In this regard, we need to be conscious of falling into the trap where one focuses too much on what can be measured or measured easily; we need to ensure that what we measure matters and also know that not everything that matters can be measured so directly.

**Regulating what Matters**

It can be argued that regulation is only a means to an end and is in service of larger objectives. In some countries, regulation and quality assurance of education providers serves to protect the country’s international reputation as it promotes itself as a destination for education or as its providers expand abroad. Domestically, it will almost always be to ensure that students undergo something that is of value to themselves and to the economy as a whole.

It is therefore important for regulatory and quality assurance bodies to remember that our professional work is intertwined with the complex interaction of social, political, technological and economic forces. And to remain relevant, we must ensure that we are not only getting valid outcomes from the work that we do but meaningful ones as well.

What does it mean when a provider is deemed to have met the standards or is quality assured?

The broader discussion in recent years has seemed to focus much more on skills, economic relevance and outcomes - How do we ensure that graduates actually have the skills and competencies that the economy needs? How should we consider the educational and employment outcomes they have achieved? How should this even be measured and should regulatory and quality assurance bodies be responsible for those outcomes?

These are not easy questions or challenges to address. Suffice to say that we will need to continue to be engaged in these discussions to ensure that regulation and quality assurance remains relevant into the future.
Chapter 8

The United Kingdom
**Contributor:**
The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

**Introduction of QAA**

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is the independent body entrusted with monitoring and advising on standards and quality in UK higher education. The Agency is dedicated to checking that the three million students working towards UK qualifications get the higher education experience that they are entitled to expect.

QAA's mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education wherever it is delivered around the world. It is an independent organisation separate from government and higher education institutions, and acts in the public interest for the benefit of students. The Agency fulfils its mission by developing guidance on best practice and by reviewing higher education providers to assess the effectiveness of their internal quality systems.

QAA works in partnership with universities, colleges and other UK higher education providers to verify and develop procedures for quality assurance. Reviews are conducted by academic staff and students nominated by higher education providers and trained by QAA. Staff, students and employers also advise on the development of QAA guidance.

Higher education is a devolved responsibility within the UK and QAA works with governments in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to safeguard academic standards.

**Future direction and challenges of Quality Assurance**

**Higher Education Policy**

Prior to the recent General Election in 2015, the direction for Higher education policy in England was set out by the previous coalition government in a White Paper, published in 2011, entitled 'Students at the Heart of the System',..
(BIS, 2011). The paper outlined a vision for a more market-led environment, encouraging a greater number and diversity of types of provider into the higher education sector, a relaxation in student number controls, and a shift in funding from central block grants to institutions, to student tuition fees funded by government loans.

Developments in Scotland have not followed the same route as England. The Scottish Government remains committed to providing higher education opportunities to all who may benefit, supported by public funding. The Scottish Funding Council distributes resources to higher education institutions. Students are not required to pay fees.

The devolved administration in Wales introduced a new Higher Education Bill in 2014 which confirmed shared funding and student support arrangements with both students and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales contributing to University fees. The new legislation also clarifies the regulatory role of the Funding Council. An independent review of higher education funding and student finance arrangements is currently taking place. It is due to report in autumn 2016.

Northern Ireland's Higher Education Strategy, 'Graduating to Success' outlines a vision for a more responsive and accessible higher education sector with a firm commitment to quality assurance and enhancement. The emphasis is on supporting economic development in Northern Ireland and raising the profile of higher education internationally.

In addition to these broad policy developments there have been significant changes in the oversight of private colleges operating in the UK. The Home Office has recognised QAA as the appropriate organisation to assess the academic quality of colleges wishing to recruit international students and BIS has asked the Agency to assess colleges applying for access to public funding through student loans. In effect, these developments have extended the scope of QAA's activities to include the greater majority of all types of higher education provider operating in the UK.

**Risk-based Quality Assurance**

The BIS White Paper also focused on reducing regulation for higher education in England including a move towards a more proportionate model for quality assurance.
'We will introduce a risk-based quality regime that focuses regulatory effort where it will have the most impact and gives powers to students to hold universities to account. All institutions will continue to be monitored through a single framework but the need for, and frequency of, scheduled institutional reviews will depend on an objective set of criteria and triggers, including student satisfaction, and the recent track record of each institution.' (BIS, 2011, p.37)

Following consultation, QAA introduced a revised method for institutional review in England (Higher Education Review) which addressed these expectations by lengthening the cycle for reviews for established higher education providers to six years and by conducting an initial assessment of the evidence provided by institutions, which lead to decisions about the size of review teams and the duration of reviews. At the same time the procedures for more recent alternative providers of higher education were extended to include checks on financial sustainability and governance. The new method was introduced in September 2014.

Quality assurance in Wales already has an element of proportionality built-in to the methodology with the interval between reviews dependent on previous track-record. Where issues have been identified the next review will be brought forward to ensure continuing public confidence. The Scottish method, Enhancement-led Institutional Review, focusses on institutional strategies for quality enhancement as well as the security of academic standards. All institutions contribute to the promotion of enhancement activities and evidence of the continuing security of standards and quality is provided by annual discussions between institutions and QAA Scotland.

**The future of quality assessment**

The devolved administrations in the UK are responsible for the quality of higher education that is supported by public funding and the funding bodies have statutory obligations to ensure that this expectation is fulfilled. To date these obligations have been discharged by separate agreements between the funding bodies and QAA, with QAA’s review activities providing the evidence to demonstrate continuing public confidence in the standards of UK qualifications and the quality of the learning experience of students.

In October 2014 the funding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland announced that they were to undertake a joint review of these arrangements
to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and address future trends in higher
education. The Scottish Funding Council is not participating in this review.
It has established its own arrangements for assessing the effectiveness of
current procedures.

The funding bodies issued a joint discussion document in January 2015
to invite comments on the ‘…broad purpose, principles and parameters of
any future arrangements.' The questions raised included the expansion
of the higher education sector, changes in student expectations, the
requirements of employers for more highly trained graduates and the growing
internationalisation of higher education. Following this initial consultation the
funding bodies will publish a more detailed specification of options, design and
implementation issues.

The outcomes of this process are likely to lead to a significant reappraisal of
the methods of quality assurance, although the key principles of co-regulation
and peer review will probably be retained. It is not possible, at this stage,
to speculate about the nature and characteristics of future arrangements in
the UK. However, the existing approach to institutional review has been in
operation for the past 25 years and it may now be appropriate to consider
alternative ways of meeting public expectations about the quality and
standards of UK higher education.

References

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) 'Students at the Heart
of the System'

Higher Education Funding Council for England, Higher Education Funding
Council for Wales, Department for Employment and Learning Northern
Assessment Review Steering Group Discussion document.'
Concluding Remarks

In the introductory section of *The Quiet Quality Assurance Revolution in the Early 21st Century* Jamil Salmi reminds us that until the 1980ties a strong tradition for external quality assurance for tertiary education was primarily in place in the United States, the United Kingdom and commonwealth countries. However, since the late 1990ties European countries have established external quality assurance agencies and since the start of this century the development of external quality assurance has taken place in most parts of the world with Africa being the region which has most recently embarked on establishing quality assurance agencies.

Hong Kong, based on its ties with the Council for National Academic Awards in the United Kingdom prior to the establishment of HKCAA in 1990, is one of the early adopters of external quality assurance in the Asia Pacific region. This publication includes contributions from HKCAAVQ's closest partners and although the agencies represented in the publication differ with respect to ownership and governance structures, scope of responsibilities, duration of existence and approach to quality assurance, the future directions and the challenges they have identified are strikingly similar in nature.

The main developments identified by the contributing agencies are listed below:

- Expansion of higher education in the form of greater numbers and diversity of types of institutions in particular an increase in the numbers of private higher education institutions
- Growing internationalisation of higher education and transnational education arrangements
- Diverse and innovative delivery models, such as online provision
- Increasing student mobility
- The continuous enhancement of internal quality assurance processes

In this context the agencies have identified a number of future challenges:

- Maintenance of an appropriate balance between institutional accountability and autonomy
• Reduction of the burden of external quality assurance on institutions and peer reviewers
• Identification and training of peer reviewers with adequate profiles
• Ensure that the quality assurance approaches applied respond adequately to the needs of students and the labour market
• Strengthen local and international confidence in the quality assurance approaches for the sake of qualifications recognition

The contributions suggest that there is agreement that the future challenges require a focus on ways to foster institutions’ continuous quality improvement and this focus can be supported through alignment between internal and external quality assurance arrangements. The fast pace of the developments in higher education requires quality assurance bodies to keep themselves up-to-date with changes both in their local and the international higher education environment and to ensure that their quality assurance policies and processes remain current and adequate to address the needs of the increasingly diverse group of higher education institutions and their students.

Communication and engagement between quality assurance agencies and their stakeholders and among quality assurance bodies have been identified as a critical tool to ensure that the quality assurance approaches stay fit for purpose.

The development in quality assurance in tertiary education that Jamil Salmi has outlined spans the last 25 years. This is a significant development taking into account that it covers not a single country or region but extends across the world. We should not forget that this development is driven by the increasing needs for quality education to ensure that the world's population is appropriately prepared to operate in the knowledge-based economy. In this context it is increasingly important to ensure that student learning outcomes are relevant and effectively delivered and that the student learning experience is positive and support the achievement of the outcomes. The need for higher education and vocational education and training is not likely to change over the next quarter century and neither will the need to focus on the quality of education provision and its benefits to students as well as its broader benefits to society. What will change no doubt is how education is delivered. As stated by the majority of the contributing quality assurance agencies they will have to keep track of the changes not only locally but internationally to ensure that students receive quality education and to add value to and support institutions in the continuous improvement efforts.