

ASEM-Education Process Rationale Paper

PEER LEARNING ACTIVITY ON NEW APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE ASEM COUNTRIES

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(1) THE EHEA AND THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION IN A GLOBAL SOCIETY

Since the 1990s the societies have gone through some fundamental changes. After the so-called third industrial revolution driven by informatics and its use in technology, and after the implosion of socialism in the Soviet area, the society has grown global in most of its basic activities in farming, industry, and services. These changes can be summarized in the following words: globalization of activities, massification of social participation while at the same time individualization of activities, responsibilities and roles, global immigration and multi-cultural cooperation against conflicts, climatologic changes which make ecology and sustainability necessary, innovation through application of new knowledge.

The global economic and financial crisis has only accelerated those fundamental changes, their challenges and the necessity to react in proper ways.

(2) THE NEW MISSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

Higher education (HE) has gone through some essential changes, precisely due to the global fundamental changes. Next to internationalization and massification, students are addressed more and more as individuals that need to be prepared to function well in the new global society as responsible citizen. Therefore, the addition of knowledge by research, one of the essential characteristics of HE, is combined with education and services to society whose importance have grown in the mission of HE. Students need to be educated and trained not only as future researchers, but primarily as global citizens who have achieved the competences needed in the 21st century. Skills and attitudes such as the ability to apply knowledge through insights in new contexts and creative thinking, the ability to analyze critically and come up with innovative solutions, the ability to communicate world-wide both with experts and non-experts, the ability to function in international and multicultural teams, and last but not least the eagerness to learn life long, have become essential. Thus HE has been confronted with a fundamental paradigm shift in order to answer these new realities and goals in the right way.

HE Institutions (HEI) are needed to be managed in another way, leaving their ivory tower and *laissez faire* policies – sometimes reduced wrongly to the concept of autonomy. Instead they need to open up to the global society with all its new characteristics, need and challenges. New Public Management has definitely entered HEIs in order to face the manifold challenges, including the competition for the best students and staff. By the introduction of internal and external quality assurance, HEIs have tried to combine the necessary quality enhancement of their educational and research processes and results with the accountability to their stakeholders and societies who

subsidize them. All these changes were introduced and realized in an economic and financial crisis by which their subsidies were generally lowered and in a political and cultural context in which trust and esteem are not taken for granted anymore but need to be proved with evidence.

(3) THE ADDED VALUE OF COOPERATION BETWEEN EUROPE AND ASIA

Since the changes and challenges are global, the possible answers should be as well. Both Europa and Asia are confronted with the same global evolutions.

Most of the challenges and changes mentioned above were identified and addressed in what has become known as the Bologna Process (BP) in Europe since 1999. After 10 years, the HE ministers of the 47 participating countries could speak of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) – and, for the 28 EU Members States, the European Research Area (ERA) – in which the goals and action lines were clear, but implemented in quite different ways, times and certainly not all yet at the grassroots of the HEIs.

The same process has started in Asia. As far as diversity is concerned Asia is even more diverse in cultures and HE than the EHEA. It counts tens of thousands HEIs delivering education in over 100 different languages. Notwithstanding this the region has developed a strong cooperation underpinned by growing massive mobility. Especially the theme of quality assurance (QA) has been a major development, through APQN (see below), and thanks to funds by the World Bank Development Grant Fund (DGF) and UNESCO's Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC).

During the financial crisis the economic balance of both regions has recently changed towards Asia. While the old Western Europe was confronted with its own traditions and nationalism, even tendencies to close up, the new opening towards Central and Eastern Europe coming out of an era of stagnation needed, to be helped. On the other hand Asia has enjoyed an economic boom indeed, yet uneven, and has got a new generation eager to learn and progress internationally. While Europe knows a reduction of the birth rate of natives and is confronted with immigration and a rising birth-rate of immigrants putting multicultural diversity and its participation in society and HE on the agenda. In the meantime the Asian region enjoys a boom in native birth-rate and wants to open up to the world through economy and HE.

(4) EVOLUTIONS SO FAR

A lot has already been prepared by the Asia-Europe Dialogue in Education started in Berlin 2008, which was continued on ministerial level in Hanoi 2009, Copenhagen 2011 and Kuala Lumpur 2013. In the conclusions of the latest meeting (ASEMME4) the ministers reiterated the importance of education, cultural diversity and social cohesion in both regions, and, therefore, acknowledged the necessity to invest in all sectors of education and training in order to further improve the quality and attractiveness of education and training systems, to provide opportunities for lifelong learning and to contribute to the development of highly qualified and active citizens who have a strong sense of social responsibilities, are open-minded and respect cultural diversity. The ministers also wished to give additional political momentum to the ASEM-Education Process by asking Senior Officials to meet yearly in order to discuss the implementation and follow-up of the ASEM activities. It is in this context that the Ministers of Belgium, both of the Flemish and French Communities, decided to

organize a peer learning activity (PLA) on new approaches in quality assurance in HE in connection with autonomy, responsibility and accountability.

Within the BP, QA has been identified not only as one of the major themes, but also as one of the most successful. Certainly with the approval of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) by the Ministers in Bergen 2005, external QA has been implemented in all countries and regions of the EHEA. In some countries this meant a kind of follow-up of the already existing internal QA systems. In other countries, internal QA was stimulated by the development and design of the external one. Since 2000, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) has gathered most European QAAs in order to cooperate on the European (policy) level as well as to learn from each other. The European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA) has concentrated on bilateral and multilateral cooperation in order to recognize their decisions cross-border. With the founding of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) in 2008, the ESG have become even more recognized as European framework for QA, since QAAs can only be registered if they are and function in substantial compliance with them. The Bucharest communiqué has put the international recognition of QAA decisions through EQAR on the agenda. For the moment the ESG are being revised in order to be even clearer to be used and to be up-dated.

Indeed, QA has become a global issue. More than 100 countries across the globe have established education related to QA mechanisms of various types based on purposes and processes. The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies (INQAAHE) gathers most of them on the basis of their good practices¹. The Asian national QAAs are now being challenged for the quality of their own operations to meet some externally determined international standards. Before 2003 in most systems quality was implicit in HEIs. Quality and assurance were both internal. In 2003, the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) was founded in order to make focus and discourse on quality more explicit by developing external QA. APQN's mission states it wants *"to enhance the quality of higher education in Asia and the Pacific region through strengthening the work of quality assurance agencies and extending the cooperation between them"*². APQN's constitution states the following purposes:

1. To promote good practice in the maintenance and improvement of quality in higher education in the Asia-Pacific region;
2. To facilitate research in the region into the practice of quality management in higher education and its effectiveness in improving the quality of higher education in the region;
3. To provide advice and expertise to assist the development of new quality assurance agencies in the region;
4. To facilitate links between quality assurance agencies and acceptance of each others' decisions and judgments;
5. To assist members of APQN to determine standards of institutions operating across national borders;
6. To permit better informed international recognition of qualifications throughout the region;
7. To assist in the development and use of credit transfer schemes to enhance the mobility of students between institutions both within and across national borders;
8. To enable members of APQN to be alert to dubious accrediting practices and organisations; and;
9. Where appropriate, represent the region and promote the interests of the region, e.g. *vis-à-vis* other networks and international organisations.

¹ INQAAHE (2009), *Guidelines of good practice in quality assurance*, www.inqaahe.org/main/capacity-building-39/guidelines-of-good-practice-51

² See www.apqn.org/about/mission/

Those purposes are still very current and could be formulated for the EHEA and ENQA/ECA as well. APQN too developed the so-called Chiba Principles in 2010³. Recently Yung-Chi Hou, vice-president of APQN and professor at the Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan, identified the challenges that Asian QA agencies are facing, including “hardly making time for internal QA of their own”, “difficulties in setting criteria and benchmarks for internal QA and external QA”, and “budget constraints”.⁴

Sheer magnitude of complexity and diversity of cultures and HE systems make the task of the regional network more challenging, at the same time more rewarding in terms of great learning from each other. It is essential that the European and Asian-Pacific experiences and are not only shared, but that their activities meet in a global context.

At the same time, QA returns again on focusing more on internal QA and quality culture, while it tries to limit the administrative burden. In both areas comparable shifts can be observed in new approaches towards QA. The risk-based approach was first implemented in Australia then in England from 1st October 2013. The move of external QA from study programme level to institutional level is clear. In some systems, as in Flanders, the concept of self-accrediting institutions is being introduced. As in the French Community, the stress on learning outcomes (LOs), both in internal and external QA, is thus most noteworthy. Some systems, as the Swedish, merely focus on the achieved learning outcomes by re-assessing the theses, while others, as in the Netherlands and Flanders, make a distinction between intended LOs and achieved LOs. Another very important new dimension for international trust and recognition is the link between international qualifications frameworks, national or regional ones, discipline or domain’s LOs and the LOs the study programmes actually define. These new tendencies and approaches in QA also touch upon the way of governance, the autonomy, responsibility and accountability of HEIs. The time is right to go deeper into these themes in relation to the global context and challenges.

(5) OUTCOMES OF THE PREVIOUS ASEM-EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

We would like to build the forthcoming PLA upon the outcomes of previous activities on QA organised from an inter-regional perspective.

The ASEM conference “Quality Assurance and Recognition in Higher Education: Challenges and Prospects”, held in Limassol, Cyprus, 6-7 December 2010 agreed on the following recommendations:

- Experts from QA and recognition agencies from Asia and Europe should meet and develop common principles of QA and recognition to be followed by both regions;
- Subsequent to setting these principles, all stakeholders should raise awareness of the existence of such standards and guidelines by organizing related Conferences;
- Networks of QA and recognition agencies of both regions should be established;
- Training seminars should be planned for HEIs officials in Asia and promote collaboration between HEIs in ASEM countries.

The participants in the ASEM Seminar on Regional Quality Assurance, held in Bonn, 5-6 July 2011 made the following propositions in terms of enhanced interregional cooperation in quality assurance:

- To explore the possibility to fund more inter-regional curriculum development programmes in line with a cross border QA procedure;

³ APQN (2010), *Chiba Principles*, www.apqn.org

⁴ Yung-Chi Hou, A. (2013), “Quality Assurance of Quality Assurance Agencies in Asian Pacific Region”, annex 1 in Blackstock, D., Yung-Chi Hou, A., Moldt, C., Udam, M., Van Zele, E., *Internal Quality Assurance Assessing Impact: Using External Review and Evaluations in Internal Quality Assurance*, ENQA workshop report 22, Brussels, p. 18

- To stimulate mutual recognition of QAAs in Asia and Europe and their QA decisions/results within and between Asia and Europe, in order to facilitate the recognition of qualifications;
- To promote the inclusion of regional and/or international assessors in peer review procedures, e.g. that assessors/peers from Asia can participate in European site visits, and vice versa;
- To observe and widen sub-regional approaches in internal QA procedures; progress in the ASEAN-QA project should be observed and could be presented in a follow-up seminar on QA.

Finally we would like to refer to the topics discussed during the ASEM Seminar on QA in HE, held in Sèvres, 11-12 October 2012 and recommendations made by participants in that seminar:

- The necessity of opening up the national QA systems in order to develop mutual understanding and trust;
- The importance of joint projects between QAAs and professionals from both regions in order to develop QA further and to settle the necessary international dimension of QA activities;
- The need for an all-inclusive dialogue, open to all the QA stakeholders;
- Within the ASEM framework the need for flexibility in developing instruments.

The participants feel the necessity to develop a common quality language and understanding that would seek commonalities between the CHIBA principles and the ESG. Furthermore the participants recommend promoting joint cooperation such as sharing of information and good practices, to undertake joint projects and to promote the exchange of quality assurance professionals between the regions. Other propositions include the following:

- To promote capacity building concerning QA by developing joint training programmes for QA, by undertaking trans-regional projects involving several countries or by supporting the development of quality assurance in a single country;
- To develop concrete cooperation between QA and recognition professionals.

(6) AIMS AND INTENDED OUTCOMES OF PLA

The ultimate aim is to get to know each other better in order to set up precise, practical and thematic cooperation schemes between Europe and the Asia. Therefore, all the categories of stakeholders of HE are invited and following themes are identified from the ASEMME 4 chair's conclusions and from the outcomes of previous seminars:

- To further develop a common quality assurance language and understanding;
- To share information and good practices related to quality assurance;
- To discuss new approaches and cooperation in QA, both internal (governance) and external, as well as the inter-linkages;
- To bring further international and interregional recognition of external QA decisions/accreditation through networks, such as APQN, EQAR, etc.;
- To develop a common understanding of the key role learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks play in internal and external QA as well as on a European, Asian and international level;
- To discuss how joint interregional projects with regard to quality assurance could be undertaken.