

PG 4: Project on Indicators of Quality

The Project

The quality assurance agencies differ greatly in the definition of quality they adopt and the methodologies they put in place for quality assurance. The difference stems from the national context and the mandate given to the quality assurance agency. From the notion of quality, the quality assurance agency develops its procedures for making 'quality assurance decisions'. A critical element in quality assurance is the use of an evaluative framework against which the agency can make decisions.

Agencies do it in many ways – some develop standards and criteria; others agree on a set of parameters and indicators; and some others define benchmarks. In these developments, the terms 'criteria', 'standards', 'parameters', 'performance indicators', 'indicators of quality' and 'benchmarks' are used often. Some of these terms are used interchangeably in some contexts; sometimes the same term is used to mean different things by different agencies. This project addresses the way 'indicators' are used.

Objective

To identify the practices followed in the APQN membership with respect to denoting quality of higher education – both quantitative and qualitative – and using them for making quality assurance decisions.

Project Group

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Expected Outcome

The project outcome would lead to a better understanding of the quality assurance standards and decision making of the Quality Assurance agencies. It could pave the way for subsequent policy formulation for regional cooperation as well as result in system wide improvements. A significant issue in regional cooperation is mutual recognition of quality assurance outcomes and facilitating academic mobility. The project on Indicators of Quality has the potential to contribute to the above-mentioned areas that need attention.

Progress Made

The project group met two times (January 2005 in Hong Kong and April 2005 in Wellington). A structured questionnaire was developed to collect data on Indicators of quality and it was discussed in the APQN meeting held in New Zealand in April 2005. Discussions revealed that the basic understanding of the terms used in relation to quality and indicators vary greatly among the APQN membership. Although the variations were expected features of the APQN membership, the discussions brought to light the difficulties some members would have in providing relevant information. It was felt that before collecting data on the pattern of use of Indicators of Quality, it is essential to facilitate a common understanding of the terms for which a background note about the various terms has been developed. It was presented in the 2006 AGM at Shanghai.

Future Action

To avoid sending too many surveys to APQN members, there was a suggestion that data collection on Indicators of Quality can be merged with the next comprehensive survey to be done by APQN. If sending the questionnaire can be facilitated, the project group leader will follow it up and finalise the report on Indicators of Quality. The final report can be presented in the 2007 AGM and conference.

Budget

Nil

Questionnaire on Indicators of Quality

Part I: Information about the APQN Member

Part II: On Indicators of Quality

1. In the academic interactions you have with your HEIs what is the definition of quality and quality assurance you adopt?
2. Do you use indicators of quality in your quality assurance procedures? If yes,
 - a. How do you define the term and what are the indicators that you use?
 - b. Which of the following would best describe the indicators you use?
 - i. Standards and criteria used for quality assurance
 - ii. Descriptors of different levels of quality
 - iii. Statements of good practices
 - iv. Quantitative norms
 - v. Others (please specify)
 - c. Have you made the indicators public to the HEIs or programmes you assess?
 - d. For what purpose do you use the indicators?
 - i. For guiding peers/reviewers
 - ii. For guiding HEIs towards quality improvement
 - iii. For quality assurance decision-making
 - iv. Others (please specify)
 - e. Who developed the indicators?
 - i. Given by the government
 - ii. Developed by the agency staff
 - iii. Identified in consultation with the HEIs
 - iv. Others (please specify)
 - f. If the indicators used are quantitative, do peers have the flexibility to use them only as guidelines? How much of peer assessment is guided by the indicators?
 - g. Do you use indicators that are used only by reviewers or your agency for quality assurance decisions that are not made known to the HEIs? If yes, what are the reasons for not making the indicators known to HEIs?

3. If you do not use the term “indicators of quality” in quality assurance discussions, are there synonymous terms you use? What are they?
4. What are the implications for your clientele for not fulfilling the minimum expectations indicated by the Indicators of Quality or similar terms?
5. From the list of appended framework for indicators of quality, what are the ones that you would consider as the core aspects that indicate quality in your country or agency context?
6. From the list of appended framework for indicators of quality, what are the ones, in your opinion, are not relevant to your country or agency context? For what reasons?
7. Once the core aspects that indicate quality are identified, how would you like to proceed to the next stage?
 - a. For each aspect spell out micro indicators to be covered
 - b. For each aspect develop statements of good practice
 - c. For each micro indicator fix quantitative norms
 - d. For each aspect define different levels of quality
 - e. Any other comment you would like to add.