

NEW YEAR 2024 GREETINGS

Dear APQN members, colleagues, and friends!

Happy New Year to you all!

There is not much time left before 2023 ends. This year was full of events that are bound to have important implications for the academic community, ministries, governments, and quality assurance agencies in our countries. The future will show whether these events are going to have a positive or a negative impact on our lives in a short- and long-term run.

The passing year is regarded as a "post-COVID" period. During this year, we have witnessed a significant decrease in the amount of students' practical training and an increase in the effectiveness of distance and blended learning. New information and communication technologies, mainly fostered by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), have penetrated education in many ways and at many levels. There are impressive advantages and serious concerns associated with the increasing integration of large language models like ChatGPT and artificial intelligence. Due to these innovations, the academic environment is undergoing irreversible changes. Our response to the changing nature of education should be adaptation to this evolutionary process rather than abolishing it.

Higher educational institutions are facing a more complex challenge: taking into account the ever increasing pace of change, they should forecast the future needs of national economies. Today, more than ever, we must work hard just to stay afloat, but to achieve our goals, we must double our efforts, like in "*Alice in Wonderland*", "it takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!" (Lewis Carroll).

Quality assurance agencies (QAAs) are also facing serious challenges. The Fourth Industrial Revolution urges everybody involved in education to contribute to training incredibly creative professionals capable of thinking "outside the box", regardless of the type of education acquired—formal, informal, or non-formal. It is up to QAAs to develop innovative and flexible approaches to fulfilling their key mission of ensuring the quality of education as well as the quality of study programmes to meet the needs of innovative economy. By joining our efforts, we will be able to rise to the new challenges and advance the development of higher education.

2023 was an anniversary year for APQN. During this year, we at APQN have held an Annual Academic Conference and General Meeting in Bangladesh; a few QAAs have successfully undergone external reviews by the Asia-Pacific Quality Register (APQR) and can now upload their accredited programmes to the Database of External Quality Assurance Results of the Asia-Pacific Quality Register (DAQAR); we have contributed to the II Global Survey initiated jointly by UNESCO and INQAAHE; and we have been involved in many other major and minor activities meaningful for education in our countries.

Not only have we become partners through our more than two decades of collaboration in the Asia-Pacific region, but we have also made lifetime friends within the Network. Through regular meetings during APQN conferences, summits, workshops and forums, extensive opinion exchange and experience sharing through the pages of conference anthologies and APQNews, we have learnt about each other's concerns, celebrated each other's achievements, supported each other's work, and developed a trusting relationship.

APQN has ambitious plans for 2024 for the benefit of our members and the general academic community, and we expect everybody involved to actively participate and contribute in implementing them. 2024 is the year when APQN will continue to evolve. We are confident that it will be equally successful. It is up to us to promote creative ideas and implement prospective projects in order "to dissolve the boundaries for the quality region".

Dear friends, we urge you to take a proactive approach cherishing bilateral cooperation and regional development. We urge you to be open-minded and encouraging, always ready to provide support and share good practices for the benefit of all. This way, we will be able to maintain, strengthen, and expand our cooperation within our network and become reliable partners for other regional quality assurance networks.

May the New Year bring you happiness, peace, and prosperity. Wishing you and APQN a joyous 2024!

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