

INQAAHE 2013 paper proposal

Title: **Coordination of external quality assurance, national policy and aid priorities: an example from PNG**

Conference sub-theme: **3 - Impact of EQA**

Topic: Linking EQA to other higher education policy levers and to donor country aid support. (Sub-theme 3: Links between QA processes and other policy instruments in place)

Authors: **Dr Jeanette Baird and Ms Wilma Paka**

Organisation: **Office of Higher Education, Papua New Guinea**

Email: *jeanette.baird@ohe.gov.pg*

Audio-visual requirements

Data projector, computer and screen for PPT presentation

Abstract

We outline a novel approach to the coordination of quality assurance, national policy and donor country aid policy in Papua New Guinea, which aims to improve the quality and sustainability of university education. We discuss the challenges and lessons learnt to date in the implementation of external quality assurance processes for universities under this approach. In particular, we discuss the challenges of implementing external quality assurance in severely under-resourced institutions. From this specific approach, we analyse opportunities for developing countries to link higher education quality assurance, led by self-assessments, to other national policy instruments and donor country education aid programs.

Outline

Approach

Papua New Guinea, with a population of over 7 million people, has a comparatively small post-secondary education sector. Its six universities serve only a fraction of the qualified secondary school graduates, and the demand for higher education continues to increase. In 2009, the Governments of Papua New Guinea and Australia commissioned an Independent Review of the PNG University System (Namaliu-Garnaut 2010).

The Review confirmed severe underfunding and overcrowding in the four public universities, the consequences of policies focused on the quantity rather than quality of graduates. It recommended only a gradual expansion of places in universities but a much stronger emphasis on quality.

Following the release of the report, the Governments of PNG and Australia agreed on an Implementation Plan. Two main elements are:

- The provision of Australian government aid funding (up to a ceiling amount) that matches annual increases in the total PNG Government funding for the State universities, and
- A requirement that all the six universities undergo independent external quality assessments to qualify for additional Australian government aid support, to implement recommendations of these assessments.

All six universities have agreed to undertake these quality assessments, the first such assessments for most of them. The model chosen for the quality assessments adapts the familiar model of quality audit but will review against 13 standards.

The novelty of this approach lies in the linking of donor country incentives (Australian Government), moderate increases in national government funding (PNG Government), and external quality assurance led by self-assessments (PNG universities). The approach provides an opportunity for:

- universities to identify their own priority improvements and receive additional funding, both as base funding and as targeted aid funding
- the Government of PNG to improve the accountability and internal management of the universities, and to gain some matching contributions for its own increases in funding to the universities
- the Australian Government to invest in systematic, rather than ad hoc, improvements to the PNG higher education sector.

That is, the Implementation Plan offers the prospect of ‘win-win’ to all three parties, if each meets its part of the bargain.

Challenges in implementation

Drawing on our experience to date, we outline some of the challenges in implementing external quality assurance led by self-assessment at the PNG universities. One challenge is that the approach requires the universities to take it on faith that additional resources will be forthcoming in future. Another major challenge is to persuade university staff that extra funding is not the only solution, and that better quality must be driven by the universities themselves. To this end, we have stressed the need for both the ‘twin pillars’ of better resourcing and stronger internal quality assurance. Another challenge is to encourage staff of the PNG universities to see themselves as part of the global community of higher education. A further challenge is to persuade academics, some of whom are frustrated and negative, to focus on systems, not on individuals, and on future improvements rather than current problems.

Lessons learned to date

We outline the lessons we have learnt from supporting universities to undertake authentic self-assessments prior to the external review process. One lesson is that a pre-existing national committee on quality assurance, made up of senior university academics, can encourage the process. Within institutions, careful explanation of the ‘twin pillars’ argument has been helpful, together with dialogue to cut through the ‘churn’ of current frustrations. We have found that persuading university staff of the benefits of internal quality assurance can be a motivator in its own right, without any need to refer to the ‘carrot’ of additional aid funding. Engagement has been most effective when we have held extended discussions with academics face-to-face at school and discipline level.

Opportunities to link EQA, policy and aid funding

Many developing countries are faced with the triple challenge of simultaneously expanding their higher education systems, improving quality, and limiting the public resources directed to these ends (World Bank, 2011).

However, the policies of aid donor countries have not always assisted developing countries to adequately address this triple challenge. A focus on basic education has meant that the priorities of some donor countries have not included higher education significantly over recent decades, although some quality assurance activities have been supported. This situation has now changed (UNESCO, 2007; Dickson 2009), with greater recognition by aid agencies of the role of a healthy higher education sector in driving economic and social development.

Given the impetus provided by this change, we suggest there may be further opportunities for donor agencies and countries to craft programs of higher education aid that work in tandem with the policy instruments of developing countries, while at the same time committing the institutions in these countries to play a role in improving their own quality.

All countries have a range of policy instruments available to them in managing and planning their higher education sectors. These range from legislation and ‘hard’ regulation through contractual conditions, financial incentives and sanctions, to negotiations, agreed frameworks and persuasion. The role of the public opinion also should not be overlooked.

The way is open to donor countries and agencies to discuss with national governments in developing countries the best ways to use some of these policy levers to pursue quality objectives in higher education, but with the active involvement of the institutions themselves (Wamboga-Mugirya, 2009).

We argue that external quality assessment (EQA) with a robust self-assessment component should be part of such three-way plans. First, it is a truism of EQA that only institutions themselves can improve their quality. Second, there is some evidence that EQA can have positive effects on the quality of higher education systems in developing countries (Hayward, 2006). Third, when conducted with a strong emphasis on self-assessment, EQA helps higher education institutions to ‘own’ the issues and to identify their own specific improvements, which in turn may ensure that funds are used transparently and systematically. Fourth, EQA can assist governments and aid agencies to better understand how academic standards in the institutions compare to international norms.

[996 words excluding references]

References

Dickson, D. (2009). *What role for higher education in development?* Editorial, SciDevNet, 11 March 2009. Retrieved 10 November 2012 from <http://www.scidev.net/en/editorials/what-role-for-higher-education-in-development-.html>

Hayward, F. M. (2006). *Accreditation and quality assurance in university education in developing countries: insights and lessons from experience*. Presentation for the 1st International Conference on Assessing Quality in Higher Education December 11-13, 2006, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. Retrieved 10 November 2012 from <http://www.apqn.org/events/past/details/presentations/?id=103>

Namaliu-Garnaut (2010). *Report of an Independent Review of the Papua New Guinea University System* (prepared by Sir Rabbie Namaliu and Professor Ross Garnaut). Retrieved 10 November 2012 from <http://www.rossgarnaut.com.au/Documents/PNGUniversitiesReview310510v7.pdf>

World Bank (2011). *Breaking Even or Breaking Through: Reaching Financial Sustainability While Providing High Quality Standards in Higher Education in the Middle East and North Africa*. Report prepared by the World Bank and the French Development Agency (AFD), in partnership with the Marseille Centre for Mediterranean Integration (CMI). Retrieved 10 November 2012 from <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/MENAEXT/0,,contentMDK:23028435~pagePK:146736~piPK:226340~theSitePK:256299,00.html>

UNESCO (2007). *Higher Education and Development*. International Institute for Education Planning Newsletter, Vol. XXV, N° 1, January-March 2007. Retrieved 10 November 2012 from http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/jane07.pdf

Wamboga-Mugirya, P. (2009). *Makerere University: Rebuilding a Reputation*. Article, SciDevNet, 11 March 2009. Retrieved 10 November 2012 from <http://www.scidev.net/en/features/makerere-university-rebuilding-a-reputation.html>