

Quality Assurance in the GCC - Challenges for the next decades

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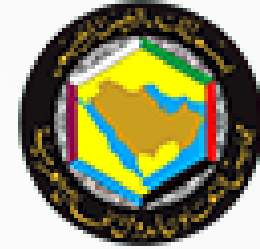
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AGENDA



- The Higher Education Sector in the GCC Countries
- The National Quality Assurance/Accreditation Agencies for Higher Education in the GCC
- Challenge: ensuring the academic standards of the graduates
- Challenge: Compliance versus enhancement
- QA Challenges for next decades in the GCC
- Concluding Remarks

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)



- Founded in 1986 by six states by the Kingdom of Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, State of Kuwait, State of Qatar, Sultanate of Oman and United Arab Emirates
- The Council aims to facilitate ‘coordination, integration and inter-connection among the Member States in all fields’ (GCC Charter, 1981).

Higher Education in GCC Countries



- ▶ The higher education sector in the GCC extends to around 60 years only
- ▶ 1957, King Saud University, Saudi Arabia
- ▶ 1966, Kuwait University
- ▶ 1973, Qatar University
- ▶ 1976, United Arab Emirates University
- ▶ 1986, University of Bahrain (as a result of merging Gulf Polytechnic (established 1966) and the Bahrain University College of Art, Science and Education (established in 1979))
- ▶ 1986, Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman

Higher Education in GCC Countries



- Higher education seen as contributor to a country's economic prosperity
- Broad purpose of higher education is adopted as being a type of public good 'necessary for the sustainable socio-economic development and growth of a country as well as increases its competitiveness in the global economy' (Dowling, 2006).
- Higher education institutions need to produce graduates who are work ready i.e. they need to have the knowledge, skills and competencies to participate effectively in the local, regional and global marketplace.

Higher Education in GCC Countries



- Increase in demand → increase in the public HEIs → introduction of private HEIs
- A total of 1,551,552 students were enrolled in 860 public and private higher education institutions in the academic year 2011-2012 (GCC-Stat, 2012)
- The tertiary gross enrolment ratio of the GCC countries as of 2011 is 24%, with the highest enrolment in Bahrain at 32% and the lowest in Qatar at 11% (Mrakaz, 2012).
- 54% of the population of the GCC are under the age of 25

increase in demand is a continuous phenomenon

The private HE sector in the GCC



Local private higher education with formal affiliations with international institutions (Oman, Bahrain)

International branches (UAE and Qatar are within the top host countries of international branches with UAE hosting 31 branches and Qatar hosting 11 (OBHE, 2016)

The private higher education sector was also open in almost all GCC countries for individual citizens or organizations

Hence, the higher education system is very diversified with limited national requirements imposed on these systems.

EQAs were established as part of a wider education & social reform

Quality Assurance Agencies in the GCC



The Commission for Academic Accreditation (the CAA) in the United Arab Emirates was established in 2001

Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) was established in 2001

The National Commission for Academic Assessment and Accreditation (NCAAA) was established by Saudi Government in 2004

In Bahrain, the Education & Training Quality Authority was established in 2008

In Kuwait, the National Bureau for Academic Accreditation and Education Quality Assurance (NBAQ) was established 2010

Qatar is in the process of establishing its quality authority

National Qualifications Frameworks



GCC countries are at different stages of developing and implementing their national qualification frameworks

A Meta GCC framework is also under development

This will provide for recognition and facilitate students and employers mobility in line with the GCC charter objectives

Challenge: ensuring the academic standards of the graduates



- Academic standards of graduates is a focus of the external quality reviews/audits and accreditations
- Discussion is based on the results of the institutional audits from the Sultanate of Oman (OAAA), which took place October 2009 to January 2015 and program reviews in the Kingdom of Bahrain (BQA), which took place between January 2012 to date as the reports of these reviews/audits are made public

Challenge: ensuring the academic standards of the graduates



- ▶ The results of the OAAA audits show that Graduate Attributes and Learning Outcomes and Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation had a large number of identified areas for improvement
- ▶ Analysing the reports' recommendations, the concerns are mainly concentrated in the following aspects:
 - ▶ Graduate Attributes and Learning Outcomes
 - ▶ Assessment and Moderation
 - ▶ Plagiarism and the effectiveness of prevention mechanisms
 - ▶ Program review and benchmarking
 - ▶ Graduate Destinations and Employability

Challenge: ensuring the academic standards of the graduates



BQA Review Reports and annual reports indicate that challenges with respect to academic standards include:

- ▶ Learning outcomes are not aligned always to graduate attributes
- ▶ Use of inadequate assessment tools for measuring the achievements of the intended learning outcomes and graduate attributes
- ▶ Internal moderation and external moderation of assessment are not utilised properly
- ▶ Little to inadequate benchmarking of programs' outcomes
- ▶ Lack of data on employability
- ▶ Ineffective mechanisms used to detect and prevent plagiarism.

Challenge: Compliance versus enhancement



The establishment of EQA agencies in the Gulf region is underpinned by two main purposes;
accountability and improvement

Provide judgement

Provide detailed review reports
Conduct capacity building activities
Providing support and training on the frameworks used

Challenge: Compliance versus enhancement



Outcomes of published reports on the OAAA & BQA's websites indicate that improvement have been introduced in the HEIs such as:

- ▶ quality assurance mechanisms, in general, were established to meet the external QA frameworks
- ▶ a number of policies and procedures adopted appear to be developed recently, in preparation for the audit/review.
- ▶ While compliance can and does lead to quality improvement at the beginning of external quality reviews, especially for underperforming institutions, there is a limit to this improvement.

QA Challenges for next decades in the GCC



- ▶ Meeting minimum standards will be no longer sufficient, there is a need to raise the bar and differentiated evaluation is needed
- ▶ HEIs need to develop a distinct identity of their graduates and find ways to ensure that such attributes are embedded into learning process and EQA agencies need to be able to evaluate this
- ▶ Stakeholders and employers need to be assured on a program outcome level as well as on institutional procedural level
- ▶ HEIs are developing innovative learning methods (flexible learning, e-learning). EQA agencies need to develop review/accreditation frameworks suitable for these types of learning
- ▶ mutual recognition amongst GCC systems is needed

Final Remarks



- There are pockets of good practice, which need to be shared within each institution and across the sector.
- Importantly, institutions need to take ownership of their quality assurance practices and standards and not be reliant on the external quality requirements.

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