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FOREWORD

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

It is truly our honour to be able to offer a global enhancement platform for the quality assurance providers in tertiary education, proudly hosted by QAA, Digitally 1-15 June.

We have, as the global QA community in tertiary educaiton, an important role to play in ensuring that the quality of, and trust in, higher education is not eroded and is improved through the known disruptions that we are facing globally, namely changing globalization patterns, changing demographics and technological change including digitalization.

Hence, under the theme: Reimagining of Higher Education Quality in an Age of Uncertainty, the Conference endeavors to unpack the most recent developments in the sphere of quality assurance to provide confidence and reassurance in changes that have come about as a result of recent disruptions and challenges.

In particular, the themes explored will evolve around:

- Digital disruption for HE brings disruption for quality assurance;
- New quality agendas for external and internal quality assurance;
- Quality assurance supporting changing learner journeys;
- Maintaining trust in the face of uncertainty.

We are pleased to be able to invite the best of the expertise globally to share the most advanced knowledge, as well as to support the discussions on our global enhancement platform.

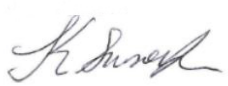
Most importantly, 2021 is a speacial year for INQAAHE, as it marks its 30th anniversary – celebrating three decades of INQAAHE's leadership of global tertiary education quality.

We are thrilled to be able to offer our 30th Anniversary conference held online. The INQAAHE Conference Committee, chaired by Orla Lynch and the QAA UK Organizing Committee chaired by Douglas Blackstock.

We cordially invite you to enjoy the unique opportunities offered by the INQAAHE Conference, which brings together the best of quality assurance practices and bridges diversity of QA systems from all over the world.

INQAAHE is always here for you and with you!

With best wishes,



Susanna Karakhanyan
INQAAHE VII President

THEME 1. DIGITAL DISRUPTION FOR HE BRINGS DISRUPTION FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Supporting Role of Quality Agencies for a Sustainable QA System: the Training Model in the "New Normal Environment"

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explain how the training of Turkish HEIs' quality commissions, which support internal quality assurance systems in HEIs, has been maintained in the new normal environment caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and to discuss the efficacy of this new training model. In the design of the training program, the HEIs' self-evaluation reports were reviewed and their areas for further development were identified. Subsequently, a distance training model based on group activities and interaction was practiced, and then the learning outcomes were defined. A total of 600 participants consisting of students, academic and administrative personnel, and administrators assigned in quality commissions of Turkish HEIs attended the training. The results demonstrated the success and efficacy of the training model practiced in the new normal environment.

Keywords: *Turkish Higher Education Quality Council, Covid-19, new normal, quality assurance, quality commissions of higher education institutions, instructional design, distance education, interaction.*

Introduction

Quality assurance practices in Turkey began in the 1990s, and program accreditation has mainly been used as a tool for quality assurance. Turkey's participation in the Bologna process accelerated the creation of an institutional structure by the State and a council was founded within the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) in 2015. Then, with the re-establishment of an independent council in terms

of administrative, financial and decision-making processes in 2017, namely Turkish Higher Education Quality Council (THEQC), the quality assurance structuring in the Turkish Higher Education System has reached the level of similar institutional structures in the world. In line with the development stated above, national standards for quality assurance in higher education were formed and institutional external evaluation activities began (the Official Gazette No. 29423 of 23 July 2015, the Official Gazette No. 30111 of 1 July 2017, THEQC, 2019).

THEQC's primary duties can be grouped under the three headings below (THEQC, 2020):

- Performing external evaluation of higher education institutions,
- Coordinating the authorization processes of national and recognition processes of international of accreditation agencies,
- Ensuring the internalization and dissemination of quality assurance culture in higher education institutions.

Along with the foundation of THEQC, "quality commissions", which are under the responsibility of HEIs, in charge of internal quality assurance in higher education institutions were also structured with the regulations THEQC issued and published. Thus, in the Turkish Higher Education System, external quality assurance is ensured by the works of THEQC, while internal quality assurance systems are executed by the operations of the quality commissions of higher education institutions. In addition to the university executives/administrators of higher education institutions, faculty members, administrative staff and students also take charge in quality commissions.

As of 2020, external evaluation activities are carried out within the framework of the Institutional External Evaluation Program, the Institutional Accreditation Program, and the Institutional Follow-up Program (THEQC, 2021). Also, awareness-raising processes aimed at increasing the culture of quality assurance are carried out intensively. Through all these activities, THEQC completed the institutional external evaluation of more than 160 higher education institutions, carried out accreditation and recognition procedures for 15 program accrediting agencies, consisting of 12 national and 3 international entities, and has held numerous information sharing, and awareness-raising meetings (THEQC, 2020).

The underlying reason for THEQC's success in a short time lies in higher education institutions' ownership of the quality assurance works and the increased awareness of all stakeholders. At this point, the training provided by THEQC is of great importance. Although the training activities were carried out mainly to increase the awareness of external evaluators and institutions' officials, they were extended in line with stakeholder feedback to include members of the higher education quality commissions and university students. To date, more than 800 external evaluators composed of executives/administrators, faculty members, administrative staff, and students of higher education institutions have been trained in these activities. Besides, training has also been provided to quality commissions and students from all universities across the country.

Another training activity highly valued by THEQC to support the quality assurance of higher education institutions is the Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program. This training, which includes different stakeholders working in the quality commissions, enables quality commissions and THEQC to speak the same language, increases the capacity of the quality assurance systems of higher education institutions, and also helps them to prepare correctly the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report, which is a crucial document that reveals this capacity.

During the pandemic period, THEQC quickly shifted its training activities to distance learning platforms. However, at this point, THEQC perceived this transformation as an opportunity to improve existing training services rather than a crisis or an urgent transfer of traditional training processes to remote learning environments. Such a transformation has been reflected in instructional design processes through the following developments:

- Analysis phase; need and task analysis for distance education, remote/blended external evaluation and institutional uncertainty.
- Development phase; consideration of interaction and engagement.

The purpose of this study is to examine the Higher Education Quality Commissions' Training Program, that THEQC realized in 2020 with this perspective, in terms of design, development, implementation, and of course, effectiveness.

Method

The research was conducted as part of a program assessment approach (Driscoll & Dick, 1999; Briggs, 1984). In this sense, as a first step, an instructional design process was carried out. Then, the teaching activities developed were implemented and the effectiveness of the program was evaluated according to the results obtained.

Institutional Design Process and Activities

All instructional design activities carried out within the scope of the research were conducted within the context of the "*THEQC Evaluator Training Model*".

In order to train the human resources of internal and external quality assurance studies in THEQC's institutional external evaluation and accreditation processes, "THEQC Evaluator Training Model" was developed based on the instructional design models of Dick, Dick and Carey (2015) and Smith and Ragan (2004) as well as THEQC's previous experiences in institutional external evaluation and evaluator trainings. It is an original model compatible with the dynamics of the Turkish higher education culture and global developments. This model systematically addresses evaluator training with examinations on the following issues and their components:

- Analysis (conditions, tasks, needs, expectations, technology),
- Design (goal, target, strategy, interaction),
- Development (environment, method, material, assessment tool, learning resources),
- Formative evaluation (expert opinions),
- Moderator (instructor) training,
- Conformity review (with moderators),
- Implementation,
- Effectiveness and impact (success, satisfaction, long-term effects).

The new dynamics of the pandemic period were reflected in this design model in the form of online training activities and, consequently, new components of the environment, method, and skills.

THEQC made significant changes in its training activities in terms of environment and method during the pandemic period. Two components were at the center of this change:

1. Bringing the interaction (with dimensions such as student-material, student-student, and student-teacher) to a higher level in distance learning-teaching processes than in face-to-face processes,
2. Increasing the competencies in combating uncertainty at the point of ensuring/evaluating quality assurance.

This transformation of perspective brought the concept of dealing with quality assurance skills in the design phase of teaching activities in the context of tackling uncertainty, and thus the concept of including skills to manage change in an agile (urgent) manner. In the development phase, determining the teaching method, materials, and distance education infrastructure that will maximize interaction has become an important requirement. At this point, an important change has been made to improve the skills of trainers (we call it moderators) in training programs regarding distance and interactive teaching methods.

The objective of the Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program planned for 2020 was based on the development of internal quality assurance processes implemented in higher education institutions in accordance with universal/national standards, as well as the support for the means to fight against the uncertainty that began with the COVID-19 pandemic. Quality Commissions, which exist in all higher education institutions in Turkey by law and which are responsible for coordinating the quality assurance processes, have stakeholders like university executives/administrators, academics, administrative staff, and students.

The process of developing the Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program began with needs and task analysis. The task analysis revealed new tasks for quality commissions, shaped in the light of the existing changes, and the needs analysis disclosed new learning needs. To this end, the opinions of experts in quality assurance, staff who work in quality commissions of higher education institutions as well as those of experts in the field of management, leadership, and educational technology were received. Thus, the development of internal quality assurance systems, as well as the needs in areas such as leadership, change management, and process management, were identified. Achievements determined in the light of needs have been distributed, according to Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956; Colder, 1983), in the cognitive (knowledge, understanding, practice, analysis, synthesis, assessment), affective (development of the value judgment) and psychomotor (skilled movements) domains. These achievements are listed below.

- Explanation of the conceptual dimension of the quality assurance system and institutional accreditation program in higher education (understanding, comprehension-valuing),
- Creation of mechanisms for ensuring stakeholder participation in the quality assurance system (application),
- Conduct of studies on strategic management and process management in the higher education institution (application),
- Conduct of studies on process management in the higher education institution (application),
- Execution of, and leadership for activities to disseminate the quality assurance culture within the institution (valuing, internalizing),
- Execution of the institution's internal evaluation processes (review, placing importance/evaluation, internalizing, skilled movements).

During the development phase, teaching approaches and methods were determined in light of both the determined objectives and the conditions of the pandemic period. Flipped learning, group-based discussions, and collective decision-making processes based on simulation of real events/situations are included in the teaching approach. In this direction, the parts of the content that serve to increase basic cognitive competencies such as knowledge and comprehension have been transformed into formats that support self-learning (short text, diagram, presentation, short video, etc.) and presented to the participants from the Learning Resources section of the THEQC's E-learning Platform. To develop high-level cognitive and affective abilities, activity sheets have been developed to be used in simultaneous distance learning activities. After formative evaluations, a moderator training was held, where the training program and materials were finalized with the feedback received regarding applicability and usability.

Application and Participants

The Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program included a total of eight discussions and decision-making activities under five different modules. These events were supported by two different video conferences titled "process management" and "leadership and culture". The first module discussed THEQC's new quality assurance initiatives. Subsequently, the first activity was a JIGSAW with six topics (and related worksheets) and cross-discussions. In this activity, first, all participants were divided into six groups and a topic was understood/comprehended in each group. Later, the participants returned to their classes, and discussions were held on all topics in the classes. These topics are as follows:

1. What is a quality assurance system in higher education?
2. Quality assurance system in the field of higher education in our country,
3. What is Institutional External Evaluation Program (IEEP)?
4. What is Institutional Accreditation Program (IAP)?
5. What is Institutional Fallow-up Program (IFuP)?
6. What is the THEQC information portal?

The second module was about stakeholder participation. Therefore, it included a mind map development activity regarding stakeholder participation in internal quality assurance processes (Figure 1).

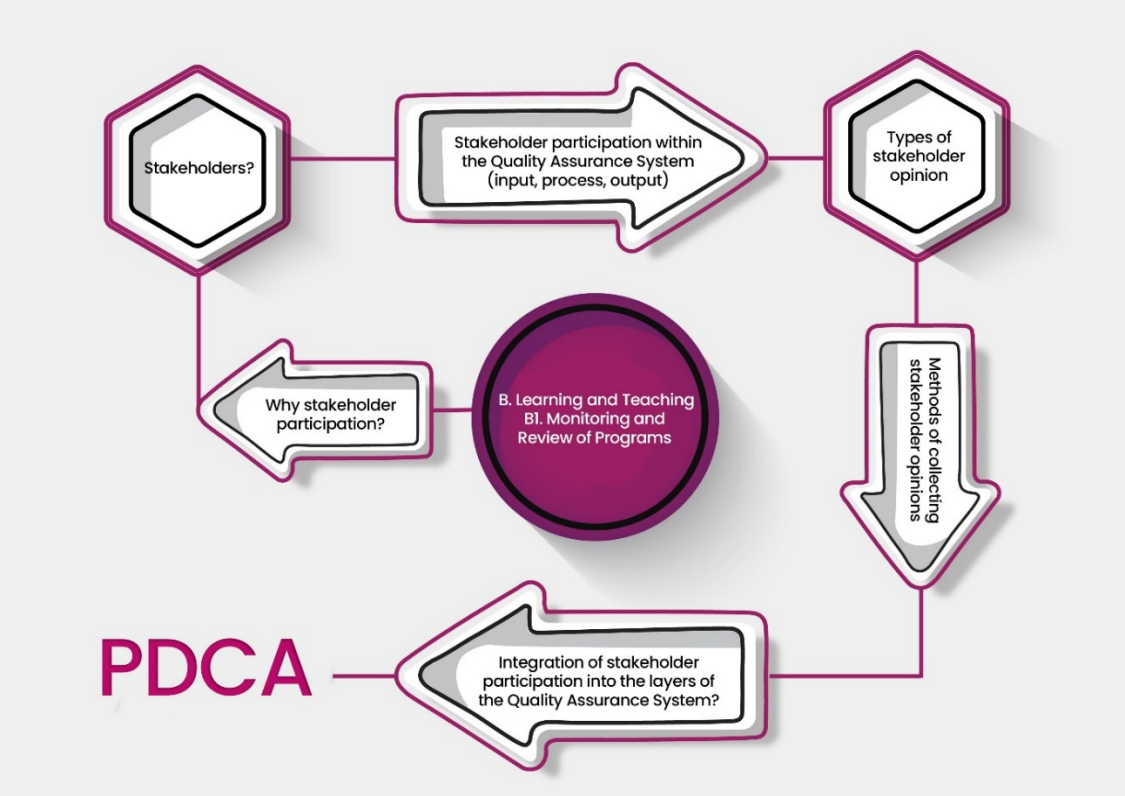

Figure 1. The basic relationship structure used in the mind map development activity.

During the activity, each class created their mind map based on the discussions in the light of the questions on the worksheet, and then these maps were compared to the answers previously developed by the team of moderators.

The third module focused on process management. At the beginning, there was a video conference titled “Process Management” and two separate activities were included in this module. One of these activities is the completion of an incomplete concept map for process management. This map is given in Figure 2.

Another activity of this module was the definition of processes. In this activity, an answer was sought to the question "What are the macro and sub-processes of a higher education institution?" based on discussions in each class.

The fourth module consisted of a videoconference titled “Leadership and Culture” and related discussions were done.

The fifth module, on the other hand, involved reviewing a simulated quality assurance self-evaluation report of The Sun University (Güneş University), a fictional university created by THEQC, in various dimensions. Four different activities were included in this module. As part of these activities, the following issues related to the internal quality assurance processes of the Güneş University were reviewed:

- stakeholder participation,
- the nature of the quality commission's activities,
- the competence of the University to decide on the maturity of its quality assurance processes (in accordance with THEQC's grading rubric evaluation form),
- the status of taking into account the suggestions for improvement, and
- the relevance of expressing all these elements in the report.

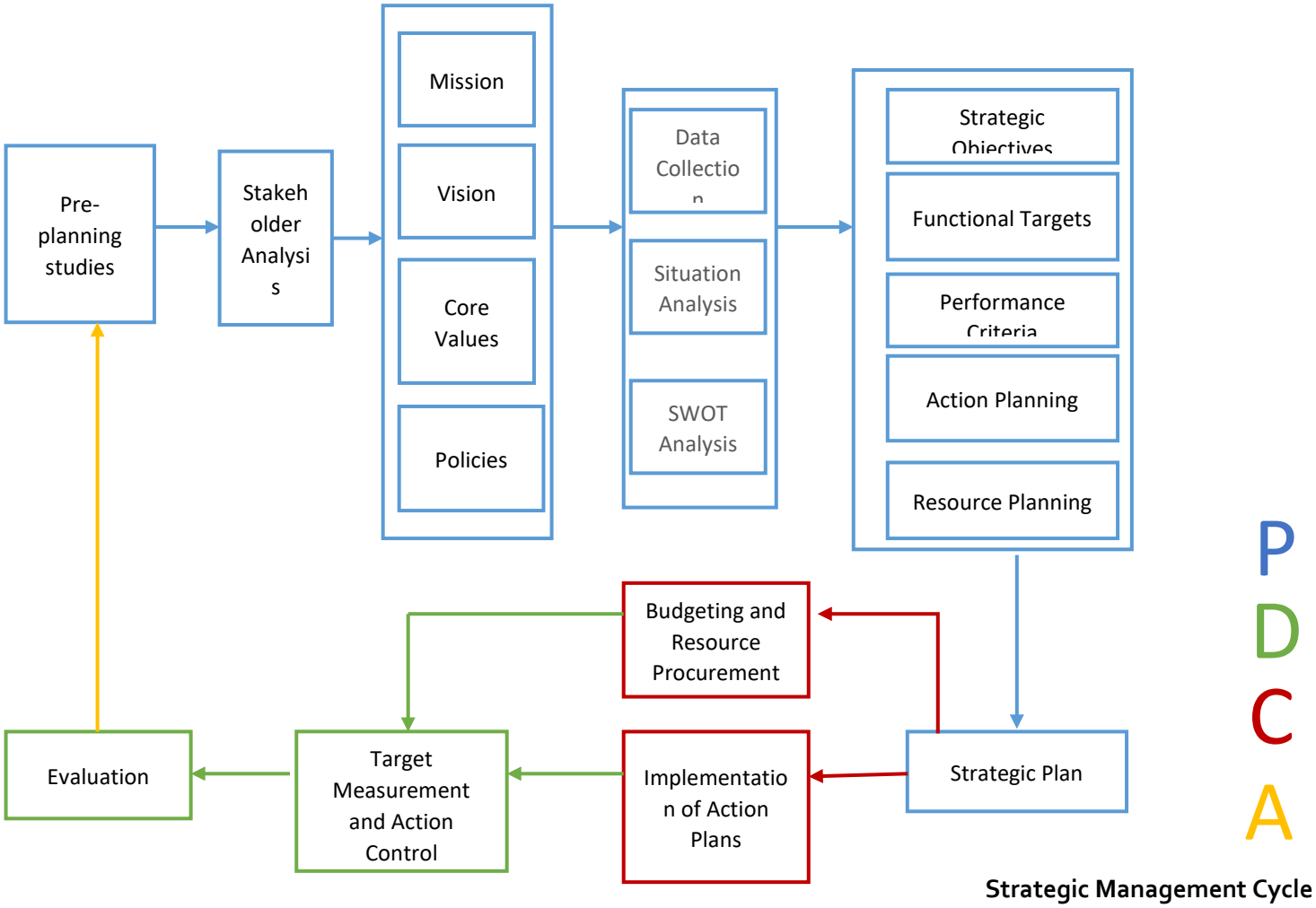

Figure 2: The final material was reached in the definition of processes activity.

The two-day training program took place three times between September 25 and October 8, 2020, on the THEQC E-learning platform. A total of 574 members of Higher Education Quality Commissions received training under the program. There was participation from 202 higher education institutions out of 207 HEIs (97.60% of all higher education institutions) across the country. The distribution of participants according to their functions is as follows:

- University executive/administrators (rector, vice-rector, dean, institute director, vocational school director): 197 (34.32%),
- Quality coordinators (coordinator, vice-coordinator): 136 (23.69%),
- Faculty members: 182 (31.71%),
- Students: 8 (1.39%),
- Administrative staff (secretary-general, head of an administrative department, adviser, secretary, officer): 51 (8.89%).

53% of participants had already attended the training activities offered by THEQC, and 47% have followed the training provided by THEQC for the first time.

There were 10 different virtual classrooms and 10 moderators in each training program attended by an average of 192 people. Also, a coordination team made up of information and communication technologists and educational scientists were present in each training program. All training materials, worksheets, and related learning resources were emailed to participants at least one week before the training.

During the training programs, participants took an active role in all learning activities in the main room and classrooms. Each participant had access to the entire program with a single link, and class-to-room transitions were performed automatically by the system. A total of 85.68% participation was reached in the pieces of training (670 people applied, 574 people fully participated).

Effectiveness Data Collection and Analysis

At the end of the Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program, an achievement test developed by THEQC moderators and experts as well as a satisfaction survey developed based on expert opinions were applied to participants. The achievement test consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions. The satisfaction survey, on the other hand, consisted of 17 items, three of which were open-ended, to determine satisfaction with the overall program and the moderator. Participants used the quantitative items in the tool with an understanding similar to the 5-point Likert type; they gave points between 1 and 5: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (undecided), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). Descriptive statistics and content analysis were performed on the data obtained.

Effectiveness of the Program

Achievement

When the success of the training program was examined, it was observed that the general achievement average was at the level of 76.50 out of 100 (Maximum 100, Minimum 45). It was 73.50 for the first week, 78 for the second week, and 79 for the third week. This indicated the good effectiveness of the program both in general terms and based on weeks.

Satisfaction with the Overall Program

Table 1. Satisfaction Results with the Overall Program

Item	*1st week*	*2nd week*	*3rd week*	*Average*
I found the event generally beneficial.	4,64	4,59	4,61	**4,61**
I think the training has achieved its goal.	4,59	4,49	4,51	**4,53**
The duration of the training was sufficient.	4,21	4,17	4,26	**4,22**
The online platform where the training took place was helpful.	4,69	4,69	4,73	**4,71**
The content of the training was sufficient.	4,3	4,34	4,33	**4,33**
The materials presented in the training were clear, understandable, and sufficient.	4,45	4,46	4,48	**4,46**
After the training, I feel more competent in internal quality assurance system studies.	4,34	4,37	4,35	**4,35**
Overall Average	**4,46**	**4,44**	**4,47**	**4,46**

According to Table 1, it is seen that satisfaction with the program is at a high level both in general terms and for all items. The participants say they are very satisfied with the usefulness of the online platform used. Next comes satisfaction with the overall activity and its suitability for training purposes. Satisfaction with the length of the training is relatively low. When the qualitative statements are examined, it is found that they require an increase in the duration of the training.

Satisfaction with the Moderators

Table 2. Satisfaction Results with the Moderators

Item	*1st week*	*2nd week*	*3rd week*	*Average*
The moderator carried out the process actively and effectively.	4,74	4,85	4,82	**4,80**
The moderator used time effectively.	4,73	4,79	4,69	**4,74**
The moderator provided necessary guidance when needed.	4,77	4,80	4,79	**4,79**
The moderator answered the questions posed to him or her.	4,82	4,83	4,82	**4,82**
The moderator took into account the suggestions.	4,76	4,80	4,83	**4,79**
The moderator used clear, understandable, and plain language.	4,83	4,85	4,82	**4,84**

Overall Average	**4,77**	**4,82**	**4,79**	**4,79**

When Table 2 is examined, it is noteworthy that the satisfaction with the moderators is quite high both in general and in terms of items. Participants are most pleased with the moderators' use of a clear and understandable language of expression, the way they conduct (manage) training activities, and the rate and manner of answering the questions posed. Satisfaction with the moderators' use of time is relatively low.

When the qualitative statements regarding satisfaction situations are examined holistically, inferences that support and enrich the quantitative results can be reached. Accordingly, the prominent positive and negative opinions of the participants about the program are as follows:

Positive opinions:

- The high competence level of the moderators and their warm communication style,
- Interactive teaching methods and activities,
- Possibility to work on case studies,
- The importance given to group work,
- Fluidity and ease of use of the distance education infrastructure and environment.

Negative opinions:

- The fact that one day of the training program coincides with the weekend,
- Little time allocated to training (especially for new participants),
- Duration of the training period (especially for experienced participants),
- Problems of adaptation between experienced participants and new participants.

Discussion

This study examines the effectiveness of the Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program led by THEQC in 2020, in an understanding of instructional design. It reveals the dimensions of design, development, implementation, evaluation, and suggestions for improvement. The Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program has been developed in accordance with the "*THEQC Evaluator Training Model*". Executives/administrators of higher education institutions in Turkey, academics, administrative staff, and students participated in this program at a highest level.

While the Covid-19 pandemic has influenced the whole world, Turkey is also affected by this outbreak. For this reason, the basic philosophy of this training program, which was planned and carried out remotely; was based on maximizing the interaction in terms of both human-human and human-material elements and on increasing the competence of the quality commissions about internal quality assurance processes as well as their ability to fight against the uncertainty created by the pandemic period.

A major weakness of online learning lies in the potential shortcomings that may arise in the structures of interaction (in the context of human-human, human-environment, human-content, etc.). Therefore, interaction should be seen as a component that should be developed in the design of such instructional environments. Otherwise, despite all the efforts made in the preparation phase, the effectiveness, efficiency, and attractiveness of online education may be much lower than face-to-face processes (Arkorful & Abadioo, 2015). The results of this study show that the program was able to effectively meet its objectives in terms of success and satisfaction. The opinions of the participants obtained in dimensions such as the competence of the trainers, the quality of the activities, and the usefulness of the distance education infrastructure strongly support this situation. All these results also reveal the success of the interaction and engagement components

highlighted during the design and development phase of the Higher Education Quality Commissions Training Program.

When participants' negative opinions on the training program were examined; beyond its basic design components such as goals and events; participants can be seen to focus on factors such as time and adjustment issues. At this point, it can be said that negative opinions are grouped along two main axes. The first concerns the days the training took place. The program took place on weekends due to the workload of a group of participants (such as university executives/administrators, students) and their problems obtaining time off, and due to the difficulty of obtaining training on the weekdays. However, this item, which is considered an interim solution in the design, created participant issues for another group. According to Mungania (2003), e-learning barriers can be classified into seven categories: (1) personal barriers, (2) learning style barriers, (3) educational barriers, (4) organizational barriers, (5) situational barriers, (6) content adequacy barriers and (7) technological barriers. Consequently, this encountered situation can be qualified as an individual or situational handicap of the participants. At this point, it is envisaged to create weekdays and weekends options in future training and to give participants the option to choose a date of participation.

Another negative opinion relates to the harmony between the participants and the associated time problems. In the training program, experienced participants, i.e. participants who had already participated in THEQC training, and new participants, who took part in the processes for the first time, got together. As a result of the implementation, experienced participants found the duration of the program longer, while new participants said that the duration of the program should be longer.

In this study, the coexistence of experienced and new participants was seen as a supporting element of peer learning in the instructional design process and was deliberately employed. Peer learning can be defined as individuals of equal or comparable status who help each other learn and learn for themselves both formally and informally (Theodosiou, 2018, p.6). Peer learning is one of the oldest forms of collaborative and connective learning, according to Theodosiou (2018). Peer learning involves individuals learning from each other formally or informally. In this learning process, the roles of teachers and students are not defined and roles may change during the learning experience (Boud, 2001). In this regard, peer learning is a highly valued element by THEQC in developing the skills of higher education quality commissions, which have members from different backgrounds and with different skills such as university executives/administrators, teachers, students. Therefore, it is believed that peer learning will be used in future training and training programs that will include activities where both experienced and new participants will be together. Besides, it is planned to enrich the program with preparatory/beginner level activities for novice participants and improvement/deepening activities for experienced participants. Thus, the two problems related to the duration of the program will be resolved and the process will be more effective and efficient for all participants.

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Virtual Quality Assurance in Higher Education – the Case of the Virtual Reviewing Process of Guidelines of Good Practice Alignment for Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Disruptive technologies have long been used by the HEIs since the invention of the internet. For instance, online learning platforms, such as Coursera, online review system for course work submission, such as Turnitin, and video conferencing platform, such as Skype, Webex, and Zoom, for lecture, has been widely used among the HEIs in providing distant learning. However, it is not until the outbreak of COVID-19 by the end of 2019, a surge of using digital technologies and virtual video platforms has become crucial. Likewise, the practice for quality assurance (QA) is also adapting to rapid change. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, QA agencies and networks around the world have been adapting to using digital technologies to carry out assessments, accreditations, recognitions, and reviews. These practices include using shared folders for virtual desk review to using video conferencing platform for interviews and virtual site visits. International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) also adapted its review process for the aliment of Guidelines of Good Practice among the agencies and carries out virtual site visits for QA agencies around the world. Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) has become the very first case that underwent the thorough virtual review process of GGP alignment. This first practice of virtual site visit of GGP alignment has also become one of the most important references for future QA practices.

This study aims to present the meta-analysis of the virtual review process of GGP alignment using HEEACT review as a case. This study examines the process of the virtual site visit of GGP alignments through various perspectives from different stakeholders and the reviewers. Through collecting the feedback of the various participants at the virtual site visit, this study will provide a holistic point of view of the actual implementation and challenges of the virtual QA practices. The future prospect for a new mode of QA will be discuss at the end of the paper.

Keywords: *Guidelines of Good Practice, Virtual Site Visits, Quality Assurance.*

Introduction

Disruptive technologies have long been used by the HEIs since the invention of the internet. For instance, online learning platforms, such as Coursera, online review system for course work submission, such as Turnitin, and video conferencing platform, such as Skype, Webex, and Zoom, for lecture, has been widely used among the HEIs in providing distant learning. However, it is not until the outbreak of COVID-19 by the end of 2019, a surge of using digital technologies and virtual video platforms has become crucial. Likewise, the practice for quality assurance (QA) is also adapting to rapid change. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, QA agencies and networks around the world have been adapting to using digital technologies to carry out assessments, accreditations, recognitions, and reviews. These practices include using shared folders for virtual desk review to using video conferencing platform for interviews and virtual site visits.

International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) also adapted its review process for the aliment of Guidelines of Good Practice among the agencies and carries out virtual site visits for QA agencies around the world. Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) has become the very first case that underwent the thorough virtual review process of GGP alignment. This first practice of virtual site visit of GGP alignment has also become one of the most important references for future practices. This study aims to present the meta-analysis of the virtual review process of INQAAHE GGP alignment using HEEACT as case. Since 2021, INQAAHE also adapts to such change around the world and carried out the virtual reviews for most GGP alignment applicants.

This study aims to present the meta-analysis of the virtual review process of GGP alignment using HEEACT review as a case. This study examines the process of the virtual site visit of GGP alignments through various perspectives from different stakeholders and the reviewers. Through collecting the feedback of the various participants at the virtual site visit, this study will provide a holistic point of view of the actual implementation and challenges of the virtual QA practices. The future prospect for a new mode of QA will be discuss at the end of the paper.

Therefore, the three research questions are addressed as follows

(1) What were technologies and review instruments used for virtual EQA practices?

(2) How did the varying groups of HEEACT participants perceive the process and content of virtual onsite visit?

(3) What were the issues and challenges that INQAAHE GGP review on a virtual mode brought into the Taiwan context?

Literature Review

Health Crisis, Technology and Virtual Quality Assurance

At the end of 2019, the world has been struck by a pandemic outbreak – COVID-19. Many countries have announced general lockdown of cities and have closed the borders of the nation to prevent the spread of the virus since then (Crawford et al., 2020). As a result, daily activities that involve frequent physical interaction and gathering are restricted, including educations at schools. Schools for different levels of education were asked to close down and suspend the semester at the beginning of the outbreak. And since the pandemic did not slow down its pace within a couple of months, the governments and local authorities and educators, started to seek alternative ways to carry on education for students of different levels of education, including higher education.

Digital and virtual learning and teaching activities, thus, have been considered as the key player in making education possible under the impact of the pandemic (Marinoni, Van't Land, & Jensen, 2020; Nerantzi, 2020; Toquero, 2020, Tesar, 2020). More and more students and teachers have now entered the era of distance learning or learning from home. Higher education institutions also applied virtual platforms for providing education with their students, as well as conducting research (Tesar, 2020). Breakout of COVID-19 and the lockdown policies worldwide has led universities and colleges to swift a face to face teaching in class into a full online mode (Toquero, 2020).

This rush to distance education or online teaching during the current crisis raises quality issues. Forcing a variety of face-face discourses, particularly lab work and internship, to move online, has led to concern over student learning outcomes and assessment. Although online assessment is deemed to be one of the choices to realize students' learning outcomes, it remains challenging to develop a set of criteria for QA of distance education in most nations (Coates, 2020; Brown & Salmi, 2020). In particular, the quality of online learning might be only poorly assured if higher education providers are lacking appropriate and sufficient equipment, advanced technology and physical curriculum adjustment, as well as experienced faculty members (Altbach & de Wit, 2020a). It is more challenging for professional programmes, such as medicine, biotechnology,

engineering, etc. As Malcolm Reed, Dean of Brighton and Sussex Medical School, Brighton, UK argued that, "there is no simple answer as to how to deal with students who have missed 6 months of their clinical experience" (Burki, 2020, p. 758). This issue has led some governments to take strict actions regarding their quality concerns. For example, the Malaysian government has suspended all online teaching and learning activities in the country at the outset of the pandemic, and Argentina's flagship university determined to postpone and reschedule the academic calendar instead of switching to online courses (Brown & Salmi, 2020; Martin & Furiv, 2020).

To ensure the quality of higher education, QA agencies around the world strive to conduct practices of QA through virtual platforms and digital technologies. Shifting from the "face-to-face" personal engagement with various representatives from the universities, including the interviews with students and staff members, and the actual presence and visit to the campus, the review through the virtual platform stress more on using the result of the report, surveys (both quantitative and qualitative) of the stakeholders, the documents and data which plays the evidential role of supporting the report (Eaton, 2021).

Such technology of distant reviewing process and virtual QA practices, however, is not new. Practices such as online desk review and an online interview with the stakeholders of the HEIs have long been adopted by QA agencies around the world before the pandemic happens. Eaton (2021) indicates that most QA practices to date are not fully 'off-line' before the era of new normal but rather a more blended practice of both virtual and traditional. Thus, even though the sudden change of using disruptive technologies for online QA practices may cause great challenges for QA agencies around the world, most of the QA agencies are not unfamiliar or too far away from adopting the practices. With the same goals and familiar virtual activities which has been used before the pandemic, QA agencies around the world quickly adapted to the changes and make QA practices full-online or blended in their countries in order to fulfill their role as the gatekeeper of quality education.

CHEA and INQAAHE Global study over quality assurance agencies under the COVID-19

CHEA and INQAAHE both conducted a survey of the impact of COVID-19 on quality assurance agencies, and their responses. The CHEA study showed that more than 51% of quality assurance agencies in US had postponed some visits and made others virtual. 71% of respondents had extended the terms of accredited status. For programs which required students to complete clinical, laboratory or field experience, 50% of quality assurance agencies insisted that these courses cannot be replaced in a virtual approach, despite modifying clinical experience by using simulation, independent study, or some other method to complete the semester (CHEA, 2020) . When it comes to the standards for online learning, 80% of respondents replied that they requested institutions or programs continue to meet the existing standards via a remote-learning approach. Only a small percentage, less than 11%, said that they applied some special standards or policies on a temporary basis for the scrutiny of remote learning.

In this unprecedented situation, INQAAHE is keen to find solutions to support the members and higher education community at large. On May 2020, INQAAHE conducted an online survey over the impact of COVID-19 on QA and higher education in order to develop useful recommendations on QA practices in the times of global pandemic and social isolation. The INQAAHE survey was intended to perceive what roles and responsibilities INQAAHE should take in addition to the impacts on higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies (INQAAHE, 2020b).The Online survey was structured with 4 main sections and 10 questions, including (1) The Impacts on governance; (2) Responses by QA agencies; (3) Current support to higher education institutions; and (4) The role of INQAAHE and support.

The INQAAHE global study showed that 74% of responding agencies were running remotely, and 51% faced financial crisis. Under this unprecedented situation, communication with coworkers, HEIs and other stakeholders was one of the major challenges encountered. To some extent, quality assurance agencies were attempting to support HEIs by providing online materials and resources, developing QA guidelines for their transition to online learning and launching QA action plans in conjunction with government policies. Quality

assurance agencies were impacted by three major areas, including QA governance and operations, the execution of QA activities, and financial stability. (INQAAHE, 2020b).

In summary, most QA agencies operated remotely but a small proportion of the agencies applied a hybrid approach into their operations. The main issue addressed from remote operations was related to communication with staff, HEIs, and other stakeholders. In addition, the agencies also encountered the other challenges in administration inefficiency, lack of IT infrastructure, and low internet connections. As the cancellation or postponement of face-to-face and QA activities was the key challenge that the agencies experienced during the pandemic, the study found that several agencies immediately coped with contingency plans to manage the risks and developed strategies to respond it, such as the promotion of online meetings, cancellation or postponement of events or travels, and application of health and safety measure with their staff and universities. Moreover, some of the agencies were attempting to undertake online external reviews and virtual visits, such DEAC, BAN-PT and AQU Catalanya.

In terms of challenges faced by higher education institutions, international student admissions and recruitment and financial matters became the major difficulties for higher education institutions. Furthermore, accessibility to learning and teaching, and students learning outcomes measures were identified as key issues which needed to be resolved immediately. Since universities moved into online teaching and learning mode due to campus closures, most quality assurance agencies developed online learning materials and resources to support them in the transition period.

Under the pandemic, the international QA network, like INQAAHE, is highly expected to play an active role. The webinar provided with QA experts and virtual review training workshops were two of the most valuable initiatives. Besides, the study also showed that INQAAHE should be able to provide more online resources, develop a new QA scheme, and evaluate the long-term impacts of COVID-19 (INQAAHE, 2020b).

HEEACT and INQAAHE GGP Review under COVID-19

As a national accreditor, HEEACT was established in 2005 under Revised University Act, with joint funds from the Taiwan government and 153 colleges and universities had completed 2 cycles of institutional and program accreditation. As a result of notable university requests, regarding governance and management deregulation by the government, the Ministry of Education (MOE) decided to launch the 'self-accreditation' policy in 2012 in order to increase university autonomy and build internal quality assurance mechanism on campus. In the early 2017, the MOE announced a new quality assurance policy, indicating that programme accreditation would be changed from a compulsory orientation to a voluntary approach by a approach of self-accreditation (Hou, et.al, 2018). Currently, institutional accreditation, HEEACT program accreditation, self-accreditation, recognition of local and international accreditors and oversea program accreditation are the four major QA services provided by HEEACT.

Due to only low-level restrictions being set by the national government, the Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan still could operate normally under COVID-19 pandemic. With more than 130 programs in eight universities scheduled to be reviewed by the end of June, HEEACT adopted a flexible approach on onsite visits, due to institutional concerns over campus safety.

Though HEEACT did not conduct virtual onsite over programs, it was reviewed by the INQAAHE with a remote mode (HEEACT, 2020).

In order to enhance its creditability and international capacity, HEEACT applied for INQAAHE GGP review in 2019. At the beginning of year 2020, HEEACT submitted the self-assessment report (SAR) to INQAAHE and was scheduled to be reviewed by the international review panel in April, 2020. However, due to the outbreak of the pandemic, an actual onsite visit was postponed to Sept, 2020. After few months of discussions and communication with the INQAAHE, HEEACT was informed that a virtual site visit would be carried out instead of a physical visit. It was determined that 4-day virtual onsite would be held from Oct. 5 to Oct. 8, 2020.

To compensate virtual visit, HEEACT was requested to provide a video of offices and working environment. HEEACT became the first QA agency that underwent the INQAAHE GGP review with a virtual mode.

During the virtual onsite visits, 13 groups of interviewees with a total of 110 members were invited to take part in the online interviews, including the board of trustees, HEEACT senior administrators and staff, office directors, reviewers, HEIs representatives, employers and students.

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative approach to collect the feedbacks from the participants of the HEEACT GGP review, including HEEACT working group, HEEACT senior administrators, Board of Trustees, University representatives and student representatives. There are three parts in the survey, including basic information, perception and attitude toward COVID-impacts on higher education and effectiveness and efficiency of virtual visit by INQAAHE GGP review panel, and QA challenges under COVID-19. The survey was distributed to 92 participants, including 6 Directors of Board, 28 university representatives, 13 HEEACT institutional and program accreditation reviewers, 6 student representatives, 12 international collaborative partners and 27 HEEACT staff. The online survey was conducted from 1, Jan to 5, Feb, 2021, with a total of responses. The response rate is around 51%. There were a total of 47 respondents, with the survey response rate of 51%.

All respondents were asked to fill out the 5-scale point questionnaires and present their opinions regarding two categories with more than 30 questions. All questions are simply analyzed by mean and STD, then Histograms ad Normal curve are two checking tools to realize how respondents' attitude toward the questions are distributed on the 5-scale points.

Table 1: Groups of Participants

Groups of participants	No.	%
HEEACT working group	10	21.28%
HEEACT staff (members at working groups are not included	7	14.89%
Directors of Board and MOE representatives	4	8.51%
University representatives	13	27.66%
Reviewer representatives	10	21.28%
Student representatives	2	4.26%
None	1	2.13%
Total	**47**	**100.00%**

Major findings

COVID -19 impact over Taiwan higher education

The first section of COVID-19 impacts on universities only required university representatives and reviewers to respond. It was found that they highly agreed on the university policies and related support and resources provided with faculty members and students with a score of over 4.3. Changing teaching pedagogy and are the two dimensions seriously affected by the COVID-19 according to the university respondents. In addition,

quality assurance exercises were neither reduced nor cancelled on campus, a concern about COVID-19 negative impact on quality assurance remained.

Yet, more than 90% of the respondents indicated that adjustment, change and flexibility for learning outcomes measures (Table 2)

Table 2: Level of respondents' agreement toward the COVID-19 impact on Taiwan universities

Dimensions	Items	Average recognition	SD	95% CI upper limit	95% CI lower limit
Administrative support	Effectiveness of the related policies	4.55	0.69	4.78	4.33
	Sufficient support and resources for students, faculty member and staff	4.32	0.84	4.59	4.04
	Appropriate responses to the students, faculty members and staff demands	4.32	0.74	4.56	4.07
Faculty teaching	Being required to adjust and change of teaching pedagogy	4.66	0.48	4.82	4.50
	Being required to apply	4.18	0.80	4.45	3.92
	Not lowering teaching efficiency	2.71	1.09	3.07	2.35
Student and learning	Being required to apply new modes of assessment and measures	4.21	0.66	4.43	3.99
	Being required to measure student learning outcomes according to their online learning performance	3.66	0.85	3.94	3.38
	COVID-19 negative impacts on student learning outcomes	2.55	1.03	2.89	2.21
Internationalization	No reduction of related international activities	1.47	0.56	1.66	1.29
	Increase of online international exchange activities	4.37	0.79	4.63	4.11
Quality assurance	No influencing internal quality assurance exercises 。	3.11	1.03	3.45	2.77
	Virtual onsite visit by quality assurance agencies	3.21	1.02	3.55	2.88
	No COVID-19 negative impacts on QA overall	2.89	0.92	3.20	2.59

When it comes to the significance on each dimension, it was found that there is a high level of consistency among different types of respondents. In other words, the respondents attitude toward COVID-19 impact on Taiwan higher education and quality assurance reach, to some extent, consensus (Table 3)

Table 3: Different types of respondents' perception and attitude toward COVID-19 impact on Taiwan higher education

Theme 1. Digital Disruption for HE Brings Disruption for Quality Assurance

Dimension	Item	HEEACT working group and BOT		HEEACT staff		University and student s		Reviewers		P-Value
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Administrative support	Effectiveness of the related policies	4.63	0.52	4.00	0.00	4.73	0.46	4.45	1.04	0.273
	Sufficient support and resources for students, faculty member and staff	4.00	0.76	3.75	0.50	4.67	0.49	4.27	1.19	0.131
	Appropriate responses to the students, faculty members and staff demands	4.13	0.64	3.75	0.50	4.53	0.52	4.36	1.03	0.243
Faculty teaching	Being required to adjust and change of teaching pedagogy	4.63	0.52	4.50	0.58	4.67	0.49	4.73	0.47	0.882
	Being required to apply	3.88	0.99	4.25	0.50	4.13	0.83	4.45	0.69	0.485
	Not lowering teaching efficiency	2.75	1.16	2.75	0.96	2.87	1.30	2.45	0.82	0.830
Student and learning	Being required to apply new modes of assessment and measures	4.25	0.46	4.00	0.82	4.13	0.83	4.36	0.50	0.764
	Being required to measure student learning outcomes according to their online learning performance	3.38	0.92	3.75	0.96	3.67	0.90	3.82	0.75	0.737
	COVID-19 negative impacts on student learning outcomes	2.50	1.07	2.75	0.50	2.33	1.11	2.82	1.08	0.683
Internationalization	No reduction of related international activities	1.38	0.52	1.75	0.50	1.60	0.63	1.27	0.47	0.339
	Increase of online international exchange activities	4.50	0.76	4.00	0.82	4.40	0.74	4.36	0.92	0.785
Quality assurance	No influencing internal quality assurance exercises 。	3.00	0.76	2.75	0.50	3.47	1.06	2.82	1.25	0.368

	Virtual onsite visit by quality assurance agencies	3.13	0.99	2.50	1.29	3.27	0.80	3.45	1.21	0.458
	No COVID-19 negative impacts on QA overall	2.75	0.89	3.00	0.82	2.93	1.03	2.91	0.94	0.967

P-value is set at 0.05. If it is higher than 0.05, it means that there is no significant difference among varying respondents

INQAAHE GGP Virtual onsite visit and HEEACT role

The second section mainly focuses on the implementation of virtual onsite visits and the role of HEEACT as a coordinator. Regarding the appropriateness of online survey, the virtual onsite interviewees highly agreed on the way of HEEACT contact. They were asked if the content of survey and use of English to fill in the survey were appropriately, they were slightly lower than the previous item.

As to virtual onsite visit mode, first of all, the respondents thought HEEACT sent clear messages of the content and procedures of the virtual onsite. Relatively speaking, use of English and providing interpreter during the interview became one of the major concerns (Table 4)

Table 4: Table: Level of respondents' agreement toward NQAAHE GGP Virtual onsite visit and HEEACT role

Dimension	**Item**	**Mean**	**SD**	95% CI upper limit	95% CI lower limit
On line Survey	HEEACT contacting interviewees to take part in online questionnaires	4.32	0.79	4.61	4.03
	Format of On-line questionnaires (essay and open - ending questions)。	4.13	0.72	4.39	3.87
	The content of the questions	4.00	0.86	4.31	3.69
	Use of English to answer the questions	3.94	0.85	4.25	3.62
Virtual interviews	HEEACT contacting interviewees to take part in virtual interviews	4.33	0.58	4.60	4.07
	HEEACT clear message of virtual interviews	4.38	0.59	4.65	4.11
	Quality of virtual platform	4.14	0.57	4.40	3.88
	The number of interview group (at least 3)	4.00	0.77	4.35	3.65
	The interview schedule in the afternoon	4.00	0.63	4.29	3.71
	The length of interview（50 min in one interview section）	4.00	0.71	4.32	3.68
	Use of English in interview	3.94	0.66	4.28	3.60

	simultaneous interpreter	3.58	0.79	4.09	3.08
	interview questions by the panel	4.10	0.54	4.34	3.85

HEEACT staff attitude toward INQAAHE GGP Review

HEEACT working group and staff were asked to share their attitude toward the implementation of the INQAAHE GGP review from the preparatory stage to feedback mechanism and decision making. The study showed that the respondents agreed more on arrangement of virtual onsite and feedback mechanism than communication with INQAAHE secretariat (CEO) and online questionnaires conducting. In particular, it seems that it was quite challenging for them to answer the open-ending questions in English (Table 5) .

Table 5: Leve of Agreement of HEEACT staff on INQAAHE GGP Review quality

Dimension	Item	Mean	SD	95% CI upper limit	95% CI lower limit
Communication on preparation prior to onsite visit	INQAAHE secretariat communicating with HEEACT	3.20	0.92	3.86	2.54
	Project coordinator communicating with HEEACT	4.10	0.57	4.51	3.69
	Project coordinator guidance over virtual onsite visit and online questionnaires	3.50	1.08	4.27	2.73
	GGP review feedback mechanism toward SAR	4.00	0.00	---	---
	GGP review schedule INQAAHE GGP	3.70	0.82	4.29	3.11
Online questionnaires	The selection of interviewees and number	3.60	0.97	4.29	2.91
	Format of On-line questionnaires (essay and open -ending questions)	3.40	1.07	4.17	2.63
	The content of the questions	3.60	0.97	4.29	2.91
Virtual onsite visits	HEEACT clear message of virtual interviews	3.88	0.35	4.17	3.58
	Quality of virtual platform	4.13	0.35	4.42	3.83
	The number of interview group (at least 3)	4.13	0.35	4.42	3.83
	The interview schedule in the afternoon	4.13	0.35	4.42	3.83
	The length of interview （50 min in one interview section）	4.00	0.00	---	---
	Use of English in interview	3.83	1.17	5.00	2.61

	simultaneous interpreter	4.29	0.76	4.98	3.59
	interview questions by the panel	4.13	0.35	4.42	3.83
Feedback mechanism after onsite visit	Initial review report and feedback mechanism	4.00	0.47	4.34	3.66
	quality of final report INQAAHE	4.10	0.32	4.33	3.87
	publication of final report INQAAHE GGP	4.10	0.88	4.73	3.47
	follow up mechanism INQAAHE	4.00	0.47	4.34	3.66
Overall view over quality of INQAAHE GGP review	overall quality of INQAAHE GGP review	3.80	0.63	4.25	3.35

Discussions and Conclusion

Since the pandemic continued to challenge many aspects of quality assurance in higher education, its impact has forced quality assurance networks and agencies to mitigate the negative consequences and to find new ways to adapt into this unexpected situation in the short and long term. As Grolimund, ENQA President, stated, "on-site visits were previously considered the core of external quality assurance. If COVID-19 stays with us, we will have to rethink our methodologies" (Grolimund, 2020, p.1). For example, quality assurance agencies need to plan for when experts can no longer travel; for when on-site visits should be switched to a virtual approach or postponed due to the risk of infection, and for the agencies losing fees from the reviewed units (Grolimund, 2020).

INQAAHE, the leading global network in quality assurance, published the statement "*INQAAHE's affirmation of support during COVID-19 pandemic*" on 23rd, April, 2020, indicating its support for quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions "in dealing with the emergency situation that we all find ourselves in" (INQAAHE, 2020a, p.1). In addition, it stated eight principles for crisis management in quality assurance, including adherence to integrity in assuring quality in higher education institutions; maintaining student learning experiences and engagement; ensuring equity and access as the top priorities; remaining close to higher education institutions and sharing quality guidelines with them; launching clear communication plans for confidence building over QA agencies; continuing to enhancing the role of enhanced partnership and sharing good practices; and adapting to unforeseen circumstances in the unprecedented crises (INQAAHE, 2020c) .

Due to the pandemic in 2020, HEEACT became the first virtual review by the INQAAHE. Both parties needed to respond the new mode swiftly and completely developed the new review schedule and interview arrangement during a short period of time. Throughout the virtual review process, HEEACT learned how to prepare itself to this new mode review and started to think of a more flexible, innovative and effective way to support the traditional QA. The study demonstrated that a virtual mode for quality review will likely become a new normal in most countries. In order to facilitate QA transformation in the changing higher education context, it is expected that a consolidated governance model via a triangular coordination among QA, governments and higher education under the pandemic can be highlighted in the glonacal context (Jarvis, 2014). As the statement by INQAAHE indicated, "The role of enhanced partnership and sharing good practice can never be overestimated in formulating the best responses to unprecedented crises. Limitations in the ability to meet during a protracted pandemic should provide scope for the development of more widely accessible partnership structures and these in turn will generate solutions that are more widely applicable for all stakeholders" (INQAAHE, 2020b, p1).

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Rethinking Quality through Online Learning: an Opportunity within a Crisis

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ABSTRACT

Through the COVID-19 lockdowns, universities around the world transitioned to remote and online learning. Higher Education management looked, like never before, to Quality and Educational Development Units to lead and support this transition and yet uphold standards for a strong student learning experience. The pandemic promoted partnerships between academic programmes and academic support services, and COVID-19 created communities of practice as faculty looked to peers as they navigated the digital environment. This paper shares the findings from a survey of faculty and student experiences through this rapid transition to online learning.

Introduction

This paper is a case study based on an international experience from The Aga Khan University (AKU), which has campuses across three continents, five countries and thirteen teaching sites across Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Pakistan and the UK. Operating as one university with a distributed network of faculty and students, the approach of blended learning was one that was already employed by around 25% of programmes before the pandemic. However, in the last six months, all teaching transitioned to a fully online model.

The pandemic has seen an elevation in the status of Quality units and Teaching & Learning centres across the World (Advance HE, UK 2020). Regulators such as Higher Education Commissions had to develop guidance overnight to respond to quality and equity issues in transitioning learning virtually whilst looking for examples of good practice from peer higher education institutions (HEIs) (HEC, Pakistan 2020).

This paper focuses on the efforts made through the online transition by AKU's integrated Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning (QTL_net) and the leadership it took to develop policies and guidelines that not only assured the regulators of compliance to quality teaching standards but helped to guide faculty on best practices around course design. In addition, a series of faculty development activities were provided to academic staff on how to teach in synchronous and asynchronous modes using Zoom and Moodle, respectively; employing interactive digital tools to enhance learner engagement through Digital Bootcamps (e.g. Mentimeter; Kahoot; Panopto) and peer-learning communities of practice through weekly EdTech lounges. A group of programme leaders and support services team leaders was established to coordinate the rapid transition to online teaching and learning. Student orientations to online learning were also provided, including virtual access to resources and copyright clearances.

The paper presents the findings from the survey of students and faculty's teaching and learning experiences during the pandemic and discuss the concerns around the quality of online vs 'in person' learning in higher education. This case study applies Chickering and Gamson's (1987) well-accepted "*Seven Principles of Good Teaching Practice*" to online and blended learning and identifies how the digital environment provides an opportunity for more transparency to teaching and enhancing engaged learning.

Methodology

Surveys were conducted of faculty and students' experience to the rapid transition phase to inform future digital provision and improve the academic programmatic provision. The tools, survey questionnaires and results were both benchmarked to other such national and international surveys (e.g. EDUCAUSE Toolkit; Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium 2020; Lederman, 2020; Means and Neisler, 2020). The surveys were created using SurveyMonkey, and the links were emailed to the students and faculty members in

September 2020. Responses were received from 121 faculty members and 275 students. All responses were anonymous.

Findings

Use of Technology Before COVID-19

The results show that around half (53%) of faculty respondents had used technology in teaching before COVID. This included 44% who had used blended learning approaches, 20% had taught online using synchronous modality, 26% had taught asynchronously, and 24% had never used technology in teaching.

Teaching Modalities during COVID-19

In response to the question regarding the modalities used during COVID-19, 73% of faculty members and 70% of students mentioned teaching and learning at least one course synchronously. 45% of faculty members and 47% of students reported teaching and learning through a combination of synchronous and asynchronous approaches. About 12% of faculty and students were engaged in offline teaching where the content was sent to the students via USBs and WhatsApp was used for student interaction. Students showed a preference for a combination of synchronous and asynchronous teaching (64%). The need for faculty contact through synchronous sessions was evident from the 22% of student respondents who preferred the synchronous sessions.

Types of Activities Used in Online Courses

In response to the question about the types of activities used in online teaching, both faculty and students reported reliance on live sessions for asking questions or seeking/providing clarification. The second most commonly used strategy was synchronous lectures. About 70% of the students reported using assignments and homework, and 65% reported frequent online quizzes and assessment.

Faculty Skills Development

Over half the respondents (52%) attended workshops or other sessions to improve their online teaching skills after online teaching suspension during the pandemic. About 12% of respondents attended the last workshop on online learning three years ago. The most popular faculty development sessions was a workshop on synchronous online teaching, which was attended by 77% of the respondents. This was followed by the workshop on using VLE for asynchronous teaching (41%), EdTech Lounge (35%), individual or small group consultations (31%) and Digital Bootcamps (26%).

Comfort level with Online Teaching

In response to the question about their experiences of teaching and learning comparing how they felt in September 2020 to how they felt at the beginning of the suspension of on-campus teaching in March 2020, 63% of the faculty and 45% of the students reported that they had become much more comfortable learning online. About 16% of students and 4.9% of faculty reported that they have become much less comfortable.

Access to Academic Support Services during the Pandemic

The results show that 66% of the faculty members had access to faculty development services, followed by health services (63%), IT and media support (~40%), and 30% had access to mental health services. Comparatively, 76.3% of students reported having access to technology to complete coursework or attend class. This was followed by 71.2% who had access to academic support and 58.15% who had access to mental health services. Only about 16% of students had access to career services.

Challenges faced by Students

In response to the open-ended questions on what the students found challenging, concerns were highlighted regarding access to technology and connectivity and teaching and learning clinical skills remotely. Some

students also reported on the challenges of group-work in online environments. Some comments depicting these concerns are as follows:

> "Completely depending on live lecture without providing record session was least useful."
>
> "Its (*sic*) hard to work in a group especially in this [Online] environment"
>
> "[Clinical Skills sessions] require practical work which couldn't be done online"
>
> "...I didn't have internet access throughout the session due to which I suffer[ed] a lot."

A large majority of the students, who reported connectivity challenges, were from Pakistan's remote and mountainous regions.

Discussion

The survey results have shown that initially, faculty members mirrored their face-to-face teaching strategies to the online environment, choosing to teach synchronous online classes. Over 50% of the faculty turned to professional development and started using various other online teaching strategies. Confidence has grown over the last eight months in online learning and in faculty's ability to teach online with students also satisfied with the instructors' ability to teach online. Students wanted more blended online teaching (i.e. a mix of synchronous and asynchronous). Areas of greater dissatisfaction were regarding internet access, workload, and the inability to collaborate with other students remotely. The results of our survey are comparable with international surveys such as Means and Neisler (2020).

The results also highlight the importance and relevance of Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles of good practice during the rapid transition to online teaching where faculty relied on technology for establishing contact with students, encouraged active learning, used formative assessment to provide timely feedback and encouraged group work and cooperation among students. The faculty and students have also scrutinized teaching much more so through the rapid transition to the online teaching phase than in regular face-to-face classes. Questions have arisen on assessing participation and learning online, areas taken for granted with 'attendance' being an acceptable standard for in-person learning (Lederman, 2020). These questions are equally relevant for face-to-face teaching. Alongside external quality assurance mechanisms, robust internal quality assurance mechanisms that draw on faculty's reflections, formal and informal, and students' experiences encourage improvement in teaching and learning practices (Khamis and Scully, 2020).

As noted by Flaherty (2020), the "faculty worries about the pandemic have morphed into chronic stress -- with serious implications for professors' mental health, their students and the profession as COVID-19 drags on". In our survey, mental health issues also emerged as a challenge for both students and faculty members. Students reported having access to mental health services because the university had developed special initiatives for them. However, a very small percentage of faculty had access to these services, highlighting an area that needs to be strengthened. A university faculty's life is full of the stresses of acquiring research grants and publishing in high impact journals (Lashuel, 2020). During the pandemic, in addition to the other stresses of academia, faculty had to learn new skills to teach online and ensure high-quality teaching and learning. However, as Flaherty (2020) argues, faculty's stresses were not only a result of online teaching, but they also included lack of appropriate support (e.g. teaching assistants or academic support staff), financial pressures, and family/personal responsibilities. As we think about the future, the area of faculty well-being and mental health needs to be incorporated into higher education quality provisions.

The results show that teaching is no longer just an interaction between teacher and students in online environments. Members of academic support services such as education developers, instructional designers, library, IT, and media are also a part of the teaching and learning process. Therefore, these services' quality is also an essential factor in the overall quality of higher education (Wright, Lohe, and Little, 2018). In most universities in developing countries, there are no career paths or professional development opportunities for the academic support teams because these were not traditionally seen as directly crucial to teaching and

learning. However, the pandemic has shown how critical these services are for the overall quality of teaching in higher education. Thus, quality frameworks and implementation plans need to focus on the quality of support services as well.

Conclusions

The pandemic has enabled higher education actors to re-think teaching, quality frameworks (Khamis and Scully, 2020) and teaching support services. The opportunity to enhance teaching quality through this crisis is a real one, as blended approaches appear to be the new modus operandi enabling flipped learning. Whilst quality assurance units and educational development centres that support faculty have been mobilized to support faculty to teach online, the pandemic has brought about the realization that teaching is not just the responsibility of the teacher but that Higher Education Institutions have a responsibility to provide an enabling environment for faculty and students. The internal and external quality assurance providers will need to ensure that quality frameworks ensure the quality of support services and promote the best that the digital environment affords.

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Assuring Quality amid pandemic: Case Study of the largest public sector Higher Education Institution of UAE

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ABSTRACT

The most significant disruption in recent times that impacted everything and everyone including higher education resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. Universities had to adapt and prepare for alternative and innovative ways to cope with the crises. The biggest challenge in these times is to assure the quality of teaching, learning as well as to assure the health and well-being of all stakeholders. With students not being able to reach the universities, the only alternative was to rely on technology and e-learning tools for teaching and learning. This paper presents the case study of a leading public sector higher education institution of United Arab Emirates –the Higher Colleges of Technology and its collaboration with the Quality Assurance Agency of the United Kingdom towards the mission to assure quality outcomes during times of crisis. The paper discusses how the Quality Assurance Agency of the UK worked with the largest public sector institution of the United Arab Emirates before and during the pandemic and how both benefited from the progressive relationship.

Purpose

The aim of the paper is twofold – firstly to embrace the UK's Quality Assurance Agency's initiative of International Quality Review IQR detailing different steps and stages involved in it and secondly to share the implementation of quality measures amid digital disruption at the largest public-sector higher education institution in the UAE. It is intended to share the expectations from the point of view of a regulator and also the implementation from the point of view of an institution. QAA intends to expand its provision of IQR for the international community and this platform will allow QAA to demonstrate how IQR can assist international institutions (outside the UK) to benefit from the experiences and to explain the developmental approach of IQR that builds mutual trust between the quality assurer and the quality assured to establish a progressive relationship.

Approach

The paper uses a qualitative descriptive approach to detail the International Quality Review Process and supplements with a case study to analyse processes and protocols adopted by the multiple-campus institution to continue to assure quality.

Findings

From the evidence, it is concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic acted as an opportunity to fast-track the technological advances HCT has been planning for in the past. The huge investment in IT infrastructure worked in HCT's favour and it emerged as an example of successful compliance in times of disruption and crisis.

Theme 1. Digital Disruption for HE Brings Disruption for Quality Assurance

Introduction

The Quality Assurance Agency for UK Higher Education (QAA)

The QAA is an independent, not for profit, agency and the UK's higher education quality body. It is the only body recognized to assess the standards and quality of UK Universities. QAA has over 260 member institutions across the UK and carries out a wide range of work across the UK and internationally.

QAA's work includes:

- Conducting independent peer review assessments in all UK nations, as the only recognized quality body
- Maintaining the national frameworks and reference points – the UK Quality Code and Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications.
- Offering enhancement opportunities above these thresholds, as well as advice and guidance and effective practice for providers
- Conducting in-country reviews of UK TNE in partnership with local agencies (QAA has conducted over 45 country reviews of the UK's TNE over a twenty year period)
- Developing and maintaining international partnerships with relationships and strategic links with many international quality assurance agencies.

QAA is a full member of ENQA and is listed on the European Quality Register (EQAR). It is a full member of INQAAHE and is one of only ten agencies worldwide judged to be fully aligned with INQAAHE's Guidelines of Good Practice.

QAA represents the UK in the Quality beyond Boundaries Group (QBBG), a network set up by Quality Assurance Agencies and Regulators in seven countries involved in TNE.

QAA has over twenty years' experience in quality and standards assessment, analysis, evaluation and enhancement. It has developed and implemented a variety of methods of programme, subject and institutional review for both UK home based provision and for UK transnational higher education. Key to QAA's approaches are that they are intended to be developmental, supportive and include the enhancement of the student experience. In 2016, QAA developed a new method for review of a higher education institution's quality assurance against international standards, International Quality Review. It was relaunched in 2019 with a new accreditation status.

International Quality Review

International Quality Review (IQR) is a method of independent peer review using the Internal Quality Assurance Standards of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, ESG, (ENQA et al, 2015). Where the QAA is satisfied that a higher education provider meets the requirements of the ESG it offers accreditation to the provider for a maximum period of five years.

IQR is designed to challenge existing processes within an institution and to promote self-reflection. Through critical self-analysis an institution is able to identify areas for improvement and the dissemination of good practice.

There are 5 stages to IQR, each stage leads on from the previous and builds the QAA's knowledge and understanding of the institution towards the achievement of IQR Accreditation in Stage 4.

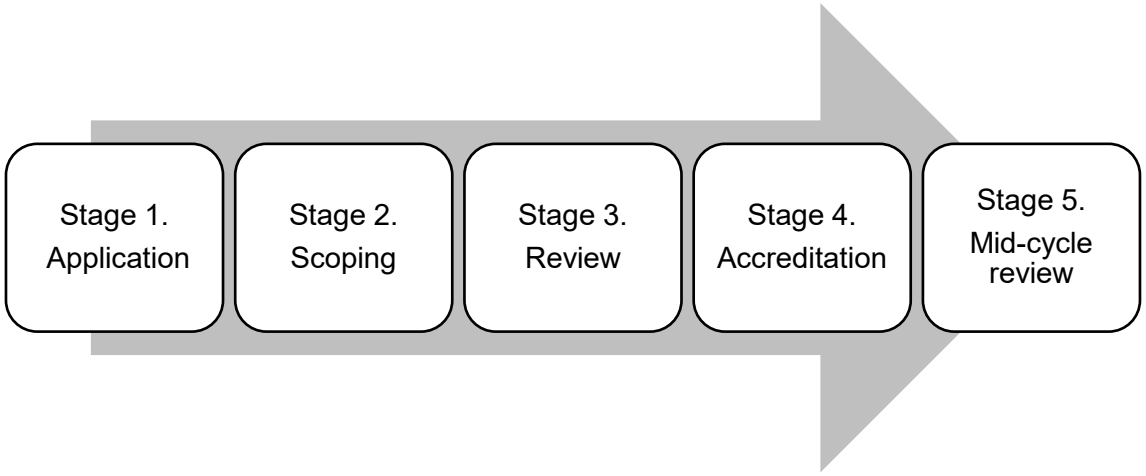

Figure 1: QAA's International Quality Review process

In brief, the stages are:

Stage 1: Application

The higher education institution submits and application to QAA providing evidence of its eligibility for IQR. This includes recognition of the institution by local regulatory bodies and quality agencies, confirmation that has been operational for a minimum of three years, has recruited at least three cohorts, one of which has graduated, that the institution is financially viable and sustainable, that it has the legal right to use the infrastructure and resources and that there is a high proportion of higher education provision in its course portfolio. A screening panel reviews the evidence submit and determines if the eligibility criteria have been met; where they have, the institution is invited to progress to Stage 2. Not all institutions are appropriate, or ready, for IQR; where a decision is made not to invite the institution to progress, reasons will be given along with suggestions on potential developmental work is needed prior to resubmission, if the institution chooses to reapply at some point in the future.

Stage 2: Scoping Stage

The scoping stage is an early opportunity to measure performance against governance looking at such factors as the institution's use of external reference points, internal quality monitoring, external accreditation, staffing, student recruitment, progression and achievement.

The scoping stage includes one of two in-person/onsite visits, in compliance with ESG requirement 2.3 which states that EQA processes should involve 'an external assessment normally including a site visit' (ENQA et al, 2015, p18).

A short report is shared with the institution which may make recommendations for improvement prior to progression to stage 3. If the QAA team do not recommend progression the report will set out key changes and improvements that would be needed to enable progression. In this circumstance QAA will agree with the institution what the next steps would be to continue with IQR at a later date.

As with all IQR stages, this is a two-way process to allow QAA to find out more about the institution as well as for the institution to find out more about the full IQR process and to confirm that progression to Review and Accreditation are right for it.

Stage 3: Review Stage

Where the outcome from the scoping stage is confirmation that the institution is ready to progress to the review stage, it is invited to progress to stage 3. This is the point at which the institution demonstrates how it meets each of the 10 ESG standards through a self-evaluation document (SED) and relevant supporting

evidence. An independent review team is appointed, comprising a UK-based reviewer, a student reviewer and an international reviewer; the team is managed by a QAA Quality Officer. This team undertakes an initial desk-based study of the SED and the supporting evidence prior to the second in-person/onsite visit. This visit includes a short tour of facilities and a series of meetings with, for instance, senior staff, teaching staff, support staff, employers, current students and alumni and other stakeholders.

The review team prepare a report from their evaluation and the recommendation for consideration by the QAA Accreditation Panel for a decision on whether or not QAA Accreditation should be awarded. An institution must show compliance with all 10 ESG to be considered for accreditation.

Stage 4: Accreditation

The Accreditation Stage involves a meeting of the QAA Accreditation Panel to consider draft reports from the IQR review stage. The panel comprises six members who have experience of international quality assurance and who are considered experts in their field. The panel determines if QAA accreditation should be awarded; the decisions of the panel are notified to the head of the institution. Where accreditation is awarded, it lasts for a maximum period of five years, subject to a successful mid-cycle review.

The review stage report which will include any areas of good practice and for development is published on the QAA website (QAA, 2021) along with a link to the institution's action plan (to address areas for development and plans to disseminate good practice) which is published on the institution's website.

Stage 5: Mid-cycle Review

Where an accreditation panel determines that accreditation should be awarded, the QAA accreditation is subject to a mid-cycle review between years 2 and 3. The institution is contacted to agree the schedule for the mid-cycle review which is designed as a desk-based study. The institutions is asked to outline any changes that might impact on the extent to which the ESG are being met; changes might include new subject areas, significant increases in student recruitment, changes in campus locations, new quality procedures and so on.

Towards the end of the five-year accreditation period QAA will contact the institution to discuss options for a further review to be undertaken with potential for a further period of accreditation and mid-cycle review.

From 2021, on the annual anniversary of the award of accreditation, QAA will request confirmation from the IQR institution that there have been no changes in circumstances that might impact the IQR process or the accreditation. This formal contact serves several purposes, primarily it ensures that communication between the institution and QAA is maintained, thus continuing the developmental approach and strengthens the relationship between the two organisations. Secondly, any relevant changes in the institution can be shared to both ensure that IQR eligibility and accreditation can continue. Thirdly, examples of good practice and enhancements can be identified and readily shared across the growing IQR community and beyond, with, for instance, QAA member institutions and international networks, such as INQAAHE.

The impact of COVID-19 on IQR

In pre-pandemic times the IQR process, (Figure 1) included two in-person/on-site visits firstly during scoping stage and secondly during the review stage; this ensures that QAA meets the requirements for an ESG compliant external quality assurance process and, more importantly, in the context of this developmental approach to review, relationships between QAA and the application institutions can start to grow and mutual trust can begin to develop.

However, these visits have not been possible during the pandemic. Consequently, IQR requirements have temporarily changed to reflect this, as these are clearly not, 'normal times'. Thus, in the current pandemic and during the time where site visits cannot be organised, QAA has replaced them with video conferences or other appropriate formats, which are agreed between QAA and the applicant institution.

QAA's alternative approach to no visit at the scoping stage is for the IQR applicant institution to provide a video, photographs or similar, in lieu of the site visit; meetings with key stakeholders, including senior management, academic staff, students and other stakeholders take place virtually and QAA share an information video about IQR in preparation for an institution-wide discussion during the virtual visit. Scoping stage visits, where in-person, will be for two or more days, depending on the complexity of the applicant institution. Where these take place in a virtual environment the QAA team are mindful of the difference time zones for the team and the institutions as well as the impact of engaging in online meetings for more than three or four hours in each day. Meeting schedules, therefore, in virtual scoping visits are limited to a maximum of four hours which also supports the different time zones in which QAA is located (reviewers for scoping stage are normally based in UK), and the location of the applicant institution, typically 4 or more hours ahead of GMT.

Similarly, where an in-person visit is not possible at the review stage: a comparable approach is adopted. Additionally, QAA's response to COVID-19 and IQR review stage visits includes the possibility of an in person site visit to be made by an independent reviewer, on behalf of QAA, who is able to visit the campus. This option has not yet been applied due to the continuing cross-border travel restrictions and local lockdown procedures. In all cases, QAA takes a risk-based assessment on whether to continue with the review stage, or not. Factors that QAA considers include recent confirmation from the relevant in-country regulatory body of successful review and/or accreditation against local in country requirements.

Where a visit from a QAA team cannot take place during both scoping and review stages, QAA requires a visit to be undertaken as part of the mid-cycle review.

Thus, despite the restrictions posed by the pandemic, QAA has shown how external quality assurance agencies (EQAA) can adapt their review method to continue to assess internal quality process within an institution against internationally recognised standards. Whilst all parties recognise that virtual reviews are less preferable to in person visits strong relationships between the EQAA and the applicant institutions can be nurtured through a supportive and developmental such as IQR.

Back in early 2019, as news of what became known as COVID-19 was starting to emerge from the far east, QAA was completing the review stage of IQR with the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) in the United Arab Emirates. A QAA review team undertook an in-person review stage visit in late January and concluded that HCT met the ten standards of the ESG; HCT was recommended for, and was awarded, QAA Accreditation.

The QAA review team identified the features of good practice in:

- The comprehensive student support available throughout the student journey that aligns strongly with the HCT ethos (ESG Standard 1.6)
- The effectiveness of HCT's engagement of employers and other industry partners in the creation and development of its academic programmes (ESG Standard 1.9, ESG Standard 1.2)
- The extent to which HCT's academic programmes are externally accredited by international bodies is commendable and brings another significant layer of external quality review to bear (ESG Standard 1.10)

(QAA, 2020a p.5)

The successful outcome of QAA Accreditation and the review team's findings around features of good practice have been endorsed through HCT's response to the pandemic. This paper will now explore HCT's response and the evidence showing its positive impact on the student experience.

The case of the largest higher education institution of UAE – HCT

The Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), is a federally funded institution, with a community of more than 23000 students and over 2,000 staff based in 16 modern, technology-enhanced campuses across 5 Emirates of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) making it the largest higher education institution in the UAE.

History and background

In 1985, the UAE government committed towards establishing a new system of post-secondary education for UAE Nationals that would stress the ideals of productivity, self-determination and excellence. The leadership of the country envisioned a system of the highest quality that would be used to educate Nationals for the professional and technical careers necessary in a rapidly developing society. In fulfilment of that vision, HCT was established in 1988 by Federal Law No 2 issued by His Highness, late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founding ruler of the United Arab Emirates. Four colleges commenced that year, followed by 12 additional colleges and the Center of Excellence for Applied Research and Training (CERT) that opened throughout the Emirates to form the system of the Higher Colleges of Technology today.

More than 23000 students attend 16 modern, technology-enhanced men's and women's campuses in Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Dubai, Fujairah, Madinat Zayed, Ras Al Khaimah, Ruwais and Sharjah. HCT offers many different, work-relevant, core programs in Applied Media, Business, Computer Information Science, Engineering Technology & Science, Health Sciences and Education which are delivered in the English language at Diploma, Higher Diploma and Bachelor levels. Each academic program includes courses in General Studies as part of the completion requirements of the award.

In line with the international criteria, the UAE vision and future development requirements, HCT offers approximately 100 specializations across 71 academic programs. All programs are designed in consultation with business and industry leaders and are aligned with the National Qualifications Framework of the Emirates (NQFE) to ensure that the skills acquired by the students are job-relevant.

Students learn in a technologically sophisticated, e-learning environment that encourages the development of independent and life-long learning skills. Currently, 100% of the programs have received national accreditation from the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) –the regulator of higher education in the UAE. In addition, HCT has a number of programs that are internationally accredited. Over 76,000 academic credentials have been awarded to its graduates. The HCT has established dynamic relationships with UAE companies and organizations and some of the world's leading universities and organizations.

The HCT's main focus is on delivering Applied Education that is 'fit for purpose' in the post-oil economic climate. HCT prides itself on pioneering the 'Hybrid Education Model' within the UAE and this is an innovative approach to the professional education model used elsewhere in the world. The HCT Hybrid Education model provides students with unique rigorous programs leading to academic qualifications with multiple exit points, as well as career preparation embedded in all programs which leads to professional certification in the field of study. In addition, all HCT programs offer opportunities for work experience through a work placement in the relevant fields. The key components of the HCT Hybrid Learning Model are shown in Figure 2.

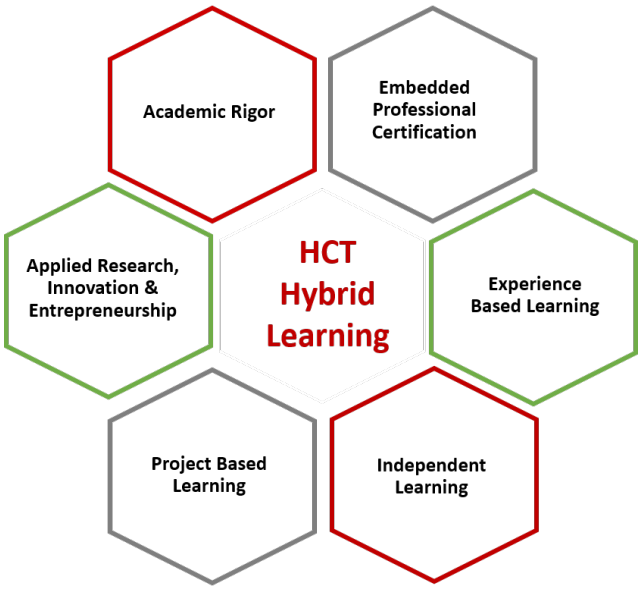

Figure 2: HCT Hybrid Learning Model

Research Methodology

Qualitative description is a "widely cited research tradition and has been identified as important and appropriate for research questions focused on discovering the who, what, and where of events or experiences and gaining insights from informants regarding a …phenomenon' (Kim, et al., 2017, p. 23). The first section of the paper has the descriptive details on who, what and how about the role of Quality Assurance Agency QAA of UK and the later part of the paper takes the form of a case study of the largest higher education institution of the United Arab Emirates. According to Yin (2009), the case study approach is best suited for studies that reveal exploratory questions such as what, how and why. Throughout the pandemic, HCT employed various data gathering tools to capture main events.

Results

HCT began its journey with the Quality Assurance Agency QAA UK in 2019 – pre-pandemic as a result of the recommendation of the task force responsible for institutional accreditation and rankings. After mutual agreements, HCT initiated alignment with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) 2015 as these were the basis of QAA's review. After the successful outcome of the initial application, the HCT team under the leadership of the dean of accreditation, started preparing the institution to align with the ESG 2015. Every member of the HCT team demonstrated and keenness and willingness to be part of the review process. QAA appointed a team of two experts for the scoping visit. It was one of the most significant milestones of the entire review process. Though the scoping visit is aimed at finding institutional suitability readiness on whether a full review can be pursued, HCT benefitted greatly from the scoping visit. QAA provided detailed guidance on the steps, the preparation institution has to do and the ways to fill any gaps that were highlighted from the scoping visit.

A special task force involving all Quality Managers, Accreditation team and other staff began the process of re-alignment to ensure that HCT sufficiently met all criteria stated in ESG. The QAA team visited HCT in January 2020 just before the Covid-19 pandemic travel restrictions were enforced worldwide.

Theme 1. Digital Disruption for HE Brings Disruption for Quality Assurance

All higher education institutions were required by the Ministry of Education of the United Arab Emirates to switch to the complete on-line mode starting the beginning of March 2020. QAA also issued a series of guidelines and essential resources for higher education providers (QAA, 2020b).

HCT's timeline of critical events from March 2020 to September 2020 is illustrated in the figure 3 below:

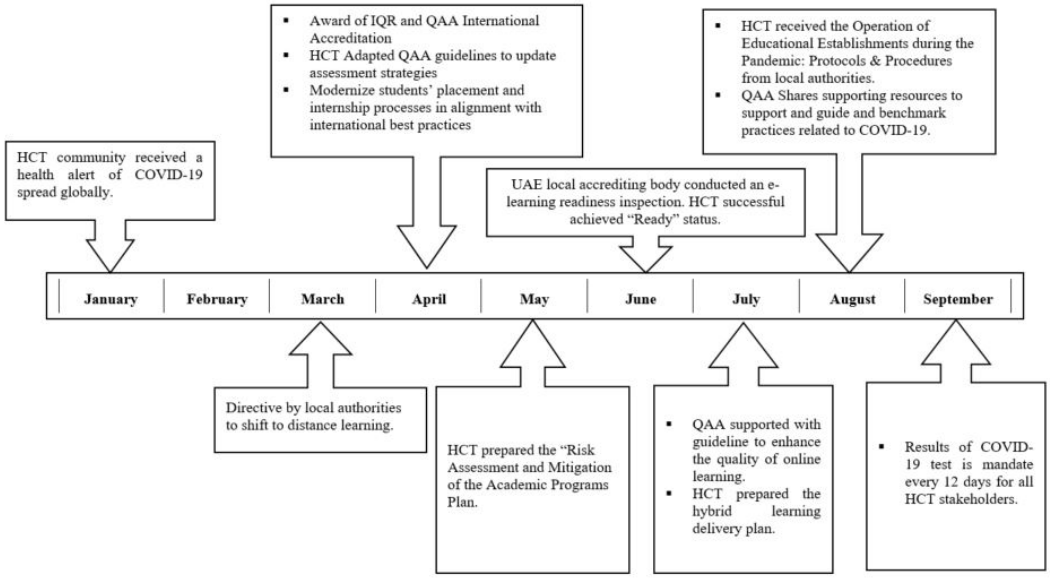

Figure 3: HCT's Timeline of main events from January to September 2020

HCT had an inherent advantage over other institutions due to its investments and reliance on technology for its day-to-day operations owing to the 16 campuses offering similar experiences to students across the country. HCT was able to completely switch to on-line delivery mode immediately, without any hiccups. The real challenge was the internet bandwidth and other IT protocols to be immediately available. The telecommunications provider of the UAE provided seamless access for HCT to carry out the entire business online. HCT started with a two-day pilot implementation of online/ distance learning across the system which is still in operation in full swing (AlShamsi, et al., 2020). The pilot aimed to test the on-line delivery tools as well as to monitor student and faculty satisfaction in the virtual environment. The results of the pilot were encouraging and it was revealed that over during the two days over 272 sessions were delivered and 22,000 individual logs were recorded and no significant issues were reported. The results of online learning readiness by students (N= 19,601) reveal that over-all they were satisfied with the availability of the online resources, communication with other students during the class, dedicated study space, ease in the use of myHCT app (one-stop solution for all student related matters), quality of instruction received, quality of network during the online class as well as the HCT online learning network. The only area where students were dissatisfied was to switch on the web camera during the online class. Owing to the flexibility of studying from anywhere, students appeared not to feel comfortable with turning their camera on. This might be attributed to the culture and also in such cases if other siblings were also taking online lessons. The summary of the student satisfaction rates of the online pilot are shown in the Table 1 below:

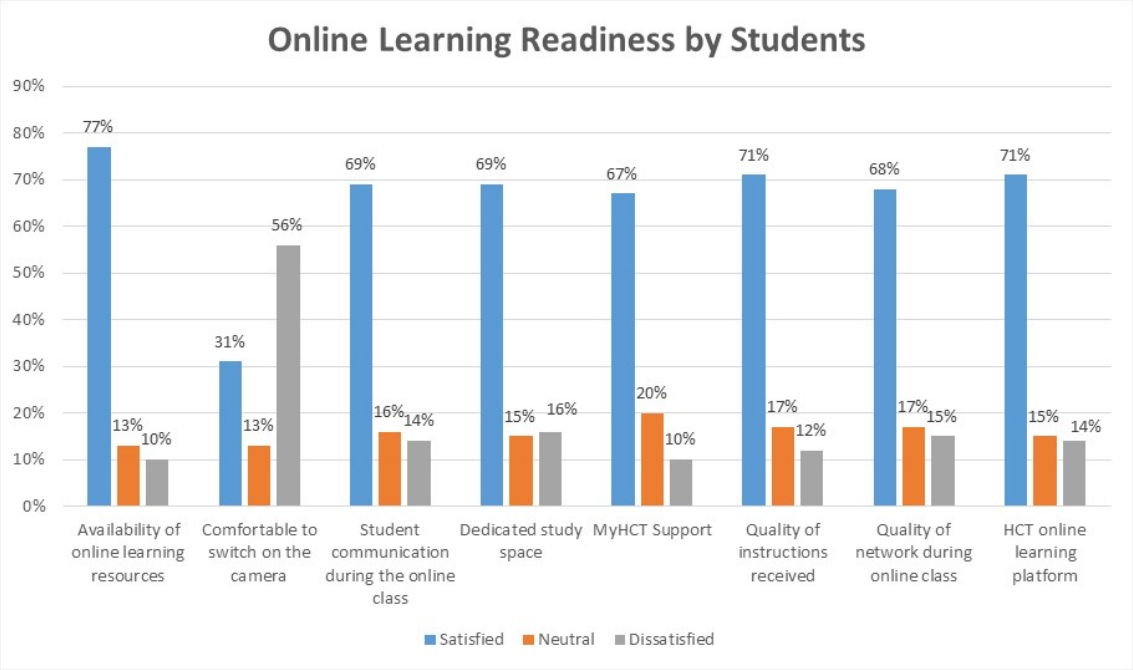

Table 1: Online Learning Readiness by Students

In contrast with the students, faculty (N=744) were found to be more ready and satisfied when it came to the online delivery pilot. 85 to 90% plus satisfaction rate by the faculty were found in a number of areas such as availability of online learning resources, student attendance, the ease of use of HCT learning delivery platforms, suffiency and quality of professional development opportunities as well as the responsiveness of their system-wide course team leaders SCTLs. Faculty satisfaction with online teaching readiness is summarized in the figure 2 below.

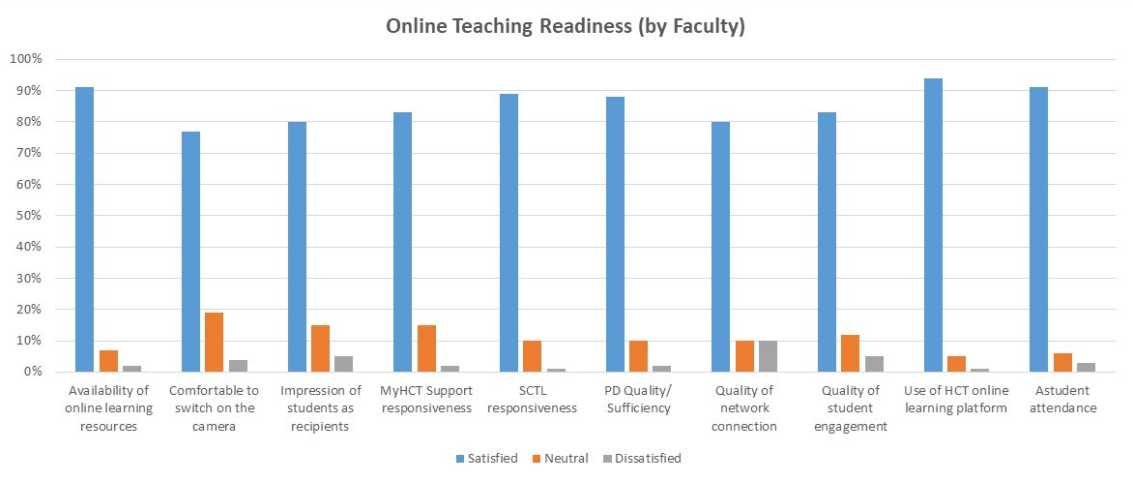

Table 2: Online Teaching Readiness by Faculty

Students satisfaction was also sought through the same survey with regards to the content of the courses delivered online. This is summarised in the table below.

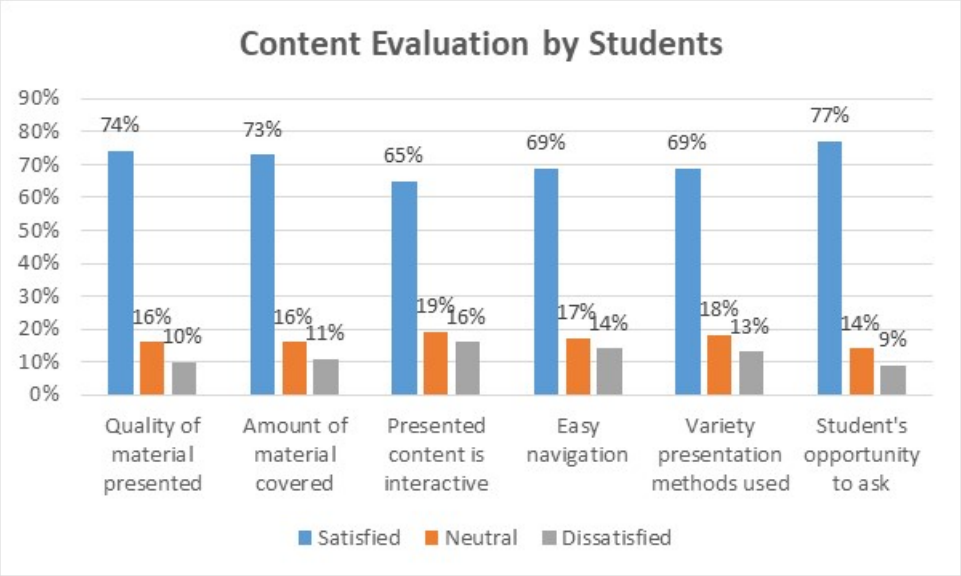

Table 3: Content Evaluation by Students

Lastly, faculty's' perception on the online content delivery was recorded. It was revealed that faculty were more satisfied than the students. 83% of the faculty were satisfied with the interactivity of the course content in comparison with 65% of the students.

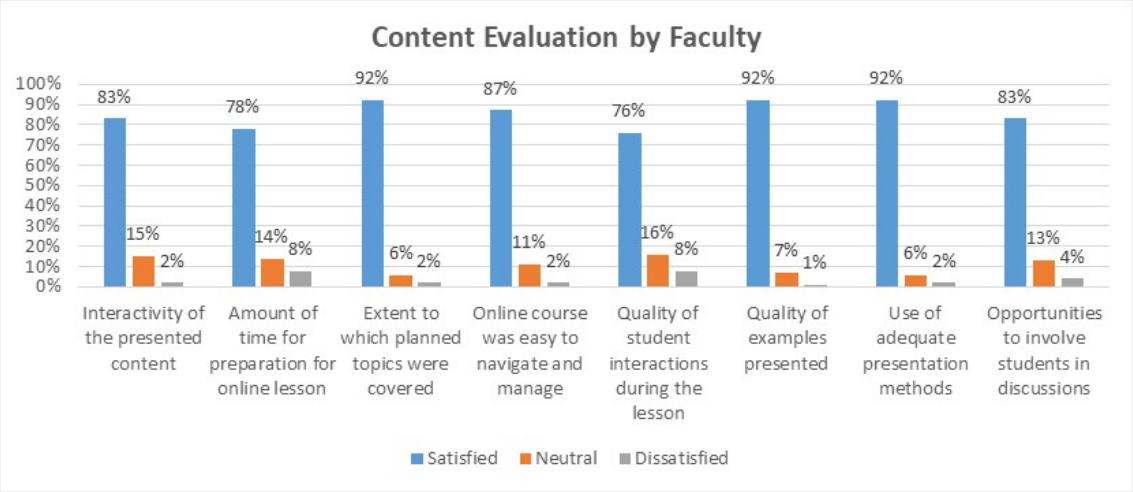

Table 4: Content evaluation by Faculty

Despite the early positive results of the pilot surveys, pandemic posed several challenges to HCT. These have been summarized below:

a. Seamless Communication

Developing a single source system of communication that is seamless, efficient and addresses most frequently asked questions from the students. This challenge was overcome by developing a single-source platform for all announcements. Only two channels were identified as official sources so that no rumours get to spread in the entire system. The Chief Academic Officer immediately assembled a leadership group comprising of senior leadership tasked to meet every day, leading up to once every week as of the day. In addition, the Chief

Academic Officer communicated directly with every faculty and leadership on matters of concern. His weekly bulletins became a popular feature to be updated on all major issues.

b. Dealing with Assessment:

The second foremost challenge was to ensure that all assessments planned for the final months leading to the end of the academic year 2019/20 are carried out in the online environment. It was the first experience for the entire system to carry out all assessments virtually. HCT acquired the online proctoring tool Respondus Lockdown Browser. Though the tool employed assisted to proctor the online exam, yet there were instances reported at some campuses where students were able to bypass the system. In order to reduce the stress from the pandemic and the sudden change to online teaching and learning, HCT offered a one-time opportunity to students to opt for an option that the students will not be disadvantaged.

c. HCT's Early Successes

HCT's readiness with technology led to seamless transition from face to face mode to complete online mode during the pandemic. Statistics of during the March – July 2020 reveal some interesting facts. Some of the key achievements include:

- Over 45,000 online professional development hours were made available to the faculty.
- Over 2,324 students participated in our online employability skills development program (this program was specially prepared for the final year students).
- Over 14,296 students participated in almost 700 Digi Campus activities (e-life skills, e-competitions, e-sports, e-reading, and e-volunteering activities).
- Over 1,900 employees have been working from home with a noticeable improvement in productivity.
- Over 9,100 human resources-related transactions fully delivered online.
- Over 400,000 square meters were disinfected in a record time
- Over 320 online contracts executed by the procurement department
- Rapid transformation to on-line education at all 16 branches and more than 23,000 students were able to continue their studies without interruption
- Launching of the Digi-Campus to promote the integrated transformation of student life activities and online (more than 700 activities).
- Completion of more than 1.6 million distance on-line teaching hours, which was among the largest number of completed on-line globally.
- Delivery of more than 61,000 live on-line classes through Blackboard collaborate ultra.
- Over 115,000 on-line exams.

d. Work Placements During the Pandemic

Fourthly, opportunities for compulsory work placement to enable students to graduate on-time had been a real challenge. With massive lockdowns and restrictions on movement during the early days of the pandemic, it was virtually impossible to arrange the work placements for the students. This challenge was overcome by the aggressive campaign with the employers by HCT's employability team. Moreover, students were offered a unique opportunity to work on the research projects with the faculty who had secured seed grants and required assistance for the research project.

e. Professional Development of Faculty and Staff

Another challenge faced by HCT was to carry out massive professional development activities for faculty and staff equipping them with necessary tools for online delivery and assessment. This was a mammoth task and

over 2000 professional development sessions were planned and delivered during the Summer and Fall semesters of 2020.

f. Meeting Regulatory Requirements

To ensure that HCT manages to meet the stakeholders' expectations and ensures compliance with multiple regulatory bodies. HCT made use of time-to-time guidelines issued by its regulator (Commission for Academic Accreditation CAA) as well as QAA UK. In addition, international regulators such as ABET, ACBSP and AACSB, etc., HCT has demonstrated sustainability and reliance in all administrative processes – all administrative systems were converted to accommodate online activities.

Learning from the e-Learning Experience:

Within the first two months, HCT swiftly transformed from the physical campus space into the DIGI Campus mode which is a complete online platform for students. The DIGI Campus provides a unique experience to the students as it delivers standardized similar learning experience to students irrespective of principal their affiliation to a specific city. It serves as a system-wide online environment for all members of HCT community and students are able to personalize their experience according to their interests. Students can access learning resources, access all services including co-curricular activities.

HCT was able to able achieve significant milestones and led its way in online delivery. Based on HCT's initiatives, the Ministry of Education recognised HCT's effort and was awarded leader in e-learning in the country.

Over 28,000 classes of more than 900,000 hours of teaching have been delivered online with over 85% student satisfaction and a plan for online summer school is in place. This was not possible without the timely and significant investments in technology. HCT expanded its collaboration with Blackboard and acquired sufficient online space for efficient online learning. In addition, HCT assured alternative tools for the on-line environment. Zoom and MS Teams were engaged across the system to ensure uninterrupted access to online platforms in case of any issues with any of the platforms.

Assessment strategies were revised and guidelines were put in place. The Ministry of Education of UAE also issued guidelines to ensure that students are not disadvantaged owing to a sudden shift in the mode of delivery of courses. GPA calculation was revised in the best interest of students while maintaining academic rigor and transparency and only grades equal to or higher than the previously earned grades were computed as a one-off measure.

Conclusions

Covid-19 pandemic was a major disruptor in the higher education arena in recent times across the globe. The whole world had shut its doors and students were bound to stay at home; as a result, it was a real test to ensure students continue their journey at the same time, the quality of their experience was also assured. Though the on-line environment can never replace the face-to-face environment, it is concluded that with timely guidance by the regulators (QAA) and timely implementation by the institution (HCT), outcomes are possible to a greater extent. QAA's IQR is aimed to assist the higher education providers to develop their systems and capacity in the light of European Standards and Guidelines. The case of HCT suggests that early adoption of technology and timely professional development and training has significantly contributed towards achieving its mission of graduating young Emiratis amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Acknowledgments

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"Blending" a Sociology Course to Promote Active Learning. Experiences of a Sociology Classrom at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

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Introduction

Quality of learning engaged in by students undoubtedly depend a lot on the types of teaching methods adopted by teachers. As a result, over the past several decades there has been an endless search across the world for the most effective teaching strategies. Teaching and learning through online and electronic media has been popular among such strategies for the last two to three decades. The most recent invention in this regard has been the blending of teaching that use online and electronic media with the more traditional face-to-face teaching done in the classroom.

According to Graham (2006), blended learning (BL) is a system that combines the best of two worlds, namely face-to-face instruction and computer mediated instruction or e-learning. E-learning environments ensure the flexibility and efficacy which cannot be found in a classroom environment while face-to-face learning environments provide the social interaction which is required for learning (Akkoyunlu and Soylu 2008; Finn and Bucceri 2004). There is also an interesting argument presented by Oliver and Trigwell (2005) about what is being 'blended' in BL. According to them BL can be defined to imply a mixing of media, contexts, learning theories, learning objectives or pedagogies as well as face-to-face and online learning. BL is defined in this paper essentially to mean a combination of face-to-face and web based teaching-learning environments. Some researchers have argued that a combination of the two strategies result in better learning for students and a more satisfactory experience for teachers (Alseweed 2013; Melton, Graf, & Chopak-Foss 2009).

The Sri Lankan national universities, in its attempt to keep pace with emerging global practices, has been eager to embark on the BL journey since the beginning of the 21st Century. However, progress has not been so remarkable particularly in the Faculties that teach humanities and social sciences. Faculty of Arts at the UNIVRSITY OF COLOMBO is no exception. Several factors have contributed towards the lukewarm attitude held by teachers and students regarding the use of technology in teaching and learning. Firstly, the students who come into the Faculty have little or no IT skills mostly due to lack of computer and internet facilities available in the schools they have attended. Secondly, the teachers who are also originally from similar backgrounds seem reluctant to adopt new teaching techniques that they have not experienced as students (Rasheed, Kamsin & Abdullah 2020). This nostalgic attitude which prevents teachers from experimenting newer strategies in their classrooms has been noted previously in the Sri Lankan context (Karunaratne 2009). Furthermore, they seem reluctant to invest their time in training to teach using technology as they have managed their teaching without such training for several years, may be decades. Thirdly, IT based teaching and learning requires a considerable proficiency in English. As a Faculty that teaches mainly in the vernacular media, some teachers and students seem reluctant to work in English which prevents them from attempting IT based teaching and learning. However, higher authorities now place a clear demand on the students and teachers to adopt the blended learning mode in the Faculty in spite of these restrictions. Given the current pandemic situation, the demand is now stronger than it was during the time when the present research was undertaken.

The current research which is undertaken in the above backdrop attempts to explore if adopting a blended approach to teaching and learning would make the students more interactive in a sociology course. Furthermore, the study attempted to examine if blended learning activities could be effectively used to help students improve their IT skills and English proficiency.

Lack of student involvement in what they learn is a common grievance of many teachers in the Faculty of Arts at the UNIVRSITY OF COLOMBO. Over the last 14 years, the primary researcher/ teacher[1] has tried out various techniques in her attempt to overcome this problem. Among such techniques were take home assignments, classroom debates, internet-based assignments, small group work and in-class discussions based on assigned readings. After every new technique the teacher has continued to question the effectiveness of the teaching method/s adopted. It is this frustration as a teacher that led the primary researcher to consider BL as the latest teaching method to experiment in the classroom. Online activities administered through the Learner Management System (LMS) of the Faculty were used to facilitate students' active involvement in their learning. Administering the activities through the LMS was useful for monitoring student participation in the activities.

Literature Review

Constructivism and the views of theoreticians such as Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky and John Dewey lie at the heart of any teaching strategy that aspires students' active involvement in learning. BL is no exception in this regard. Constructivism is based on the belief that students construct their knowledge on their own experiences. Therefore, constructivists pay attention to 1) what students already know; 2) what they are capable of doing with that knowledge; and 3) hands-on experiences provided for students as part of their learning experience. In this process the teacher's role is very important to understand how students interpret knowledge and to guide and help them to refine their understanding and interpretations to correct any misconception at an early stage (Al-Huneidi & Schreurs 2011). Vygotsky uses the term Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) to refer to the range of tasks that are too difficult for a learner to master alone but that can be mastered with guidance from educators or more-skilled peers. The educator as the faciliatator is expected to teach learners concepts which are above their current skills and knowledge level in ZPD, motivating them to excel beyond their current level (Chew, Jones & Turner 2008).

These theoretical underpinings have guided this research in using BL as a strategy towards creating a student-centered classroom that would improve students' active involvement in what and how they learn. However, the advantages and drawbacks of BL when attempted in the Sri Lankan context must also be considered. Advantages of what is being blended, i.e. face-to-face and online modes, include cost reduction, time efficiency, location convenience for learners along with the one-on-one personal understanding and motivation that face-to-face instructions presents (Graham 2006; Singh & Reed 2001). In developing countries, BL improved the quality of learning experience for students by allowing them to undertake learning activities online and thereby reducing the time they are required to spend on attending face–to–face lectures (Jagannathan 2012; Liyanagunawardena et al. 2014a). These findings highlight the need to develop online activities in such a way that they facilitate students' active involvement in their learning and in a way that the LMS is used effectively.

Since BL is still very much a 'new' approach to higher education in Sri Lanka, considerable opposition is raised from both teachers and students as it is seen as undermining the position of the teacher in the classroom. The authoritarian presence of the teacher is felt strongly as a 'requirement' by both parties in order for effective learning and teaching to take place in the classroom (Karunaratne 2009). Reducing the teacher's role from this authoritarian figure to one of facilitator is neither easy nor acceptable for majority.

Researchers have pointed out certain difficulties encountered by teachers and students in developing countries when attempting online teaching and learning. According to Liyanagunawardena and Adams (2014a), attempting online education in developing countries by way of Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs) is faced with several issues unique to their socio-economic setting. In the case of Sri Lanka these issues include access to computers and the internet, the lack of infrastructure, low levels of computer literacy, the

[1] Refers to Iresha M. Lakshman who was the lecturer responsible for teaching the sociology of education course discussed here. D. M. Y. Abeywardhana was the course assistant.

lack of local language content, and the lack of formal student support services at the University (Kaye 2002; Liyanagunawardena et al. 2014a; 2014b).

In the absence of research on using BL in the field of teaching sociology in Sri Lanka, we look at several such research from the global context. In the USA, Auster (2016) examined the impact of using screencasts as a teaching method in an introductory sociology course. Student responses have indicated a high use of the screencasts as well as the perception that the screencasts were helpful, contributed positively to performance on examinations, and also led to more positive feelings about the course more generally (Auster 2016). In another study adopting a quasi-experimental design for a comparative study on online and face-to-face teaching of sociology, Driscoll et al. (2012) have found that student satisfaction does not significantly differ across the two settings. They conclude that designing online courses using pedagogically sound practices may provide equally effective learning environments. In a similar quasi-experimental study Luna and Winters (2017) found that BL, employing flipped pedagogy and centered on active learning, may be more effective than lectures, particularly in narrowing the achievement gap between white and non-white students. William et al. (2017) claims that both modalities of teaching is associated with nearly identical learning outcomes in terms of student evaluations and final exam scores. Another study by Pearson (2010) claims that blogs provide a means of engaging students, encouraging them to connect with the readings and, even more importantly, with each other.

A study by Little, Titarenko and Bergelson (2005) demonstrates how instructors can create a successful virtual classroom that truly encircles the globe. The course they designed for a diverse student population coming from various countries has successfully contributed to enhancing reading and writing skills of students. These findings are particularly relevant for the current study as it too aspires to improve language skills of students. Eisen's 2012 study that researched the use of a photography project to teach sociology and thereby promote critical thinking revealed that the project allowed students to (1) relate the course material to their everyday world, (2) engage in an intellectually challenging assignment, (3) critically examine their taken-for-granted worlds, and (4) have fun while completing a challenging academic exercise. A group of researchers from the University of Western Australia (Forsey, Low & Glance 2013) has flipped their sociology lessons. Their findings confirm that more learning has taken place and that the students have been made more engaged learners by this approach. They claim that "Engaged learning, peer learning and a well-structured variety of learning experiences in the Australian Society unit seem to be increasing student knowledge" (Forsey, Low & Glance 2013: 482).

However, research results on teaching sociology online has not always been encouraging the practice. A study analysing student evaluations of 118 undergraduate sociology courses indicate that students feel they have learned less in online courses, believe they are treated with more respect in in-class courses, and rate online courses less highly than in-class courses (Bergstrand & Savage, 2013). In another study, Tichavsky et al. (2015) points out that online courses present additional challenges for instructors in conveying a social presence in which students perceive them as "real" people, beyond the facilitation of the course.

BL has certainly brought out the possibilities of 'deschooling society' as proposed by Ivan Illich (1973) some 40 years ago (Jandrić 2014; 2015). As Jandrić (2014: 96) puts it "Illich's deschooling has graduated from mere vision to the real opportunity." However, the opportunity is likely to be far more difficult to reach for students and teachers in countries like Sri Lanka where a significant amount of issues pertaining to infrastructure, IT competency, learning and teaching culture and language barriers persist (Karunaratne 2009).

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The research was conducted in the Faculty of Arts, Univrsity of Colombo. The entire student body (50 students) enrolled in the 3rd Year course entitled "Education and Society" (SOC 3267) in 2019 was selected for study. The attempt was to introduce online activities through the LMS to supplement in-class teaching. It was anticipated that the BL approach brought in by on-site teaching and online activities would enhance student engagement.

The online activities included quizzes, chat sessions, a forum, submission of assignments online, a questionnaire (for receiving feedback) and interactive videos (borrowed from YouTube with summaries in Sinhala[2] added). Instructions for completing the activities were provided both in Sinhala and English on the LMS.

A majority of students in the class had never experienced online activities during their undergraduate years. Therefore, a lot of planning had to be put into deciding the kind of online activities that would be more interesting for students while not posing a threat or a challenge to them given their lack of experience. The kind of early planning described by Clark-Ibáñez and Scott (2008) has been put into developing the activities used in this study. The required awareness of how best to engage students in online activities (Clark-Ibáñez & Scott 2008) came largely from the primary researchers experience teaching sociology in Sri Lanka for nearly 20 years.

Student participation in the activities were observed and monitored through LMS by the researchers. The quantitative data that are discussed in this paper are from the logs available via the LMS and a questionnaire that was conducted also through the LMS at the end of the course. The qualitative data are from the feedback provided by students at the end of the course.

A detailed description on the online activities that were carried out as part of the course is necessary before proceeding to the discussion. The following activities were conducted in the order presented below:

- Activity 1: Quiz 1 (multiple choice questions [MCQs] on "introduction to sociology of education")
- Activity 2: Quiz 2 (MCQs on "culture and education")
- Activity 3: Interactive video 1 (on "Functionalist analysis of education")
- Activity 4: Interactive video 2 (on "Marxist analysis of education")
- Activity 5: Quiz 3 (MCQs on "Functionalism and education")
- Activity 6: Chatroom 1 (on "What would I do [differently] if I become a teacher?")
- Activity 7: Chatroom 2 (on "Is this why we go to school?"; discussion stimulated by using a cartoon from the internet)
- Activity 8: Interactive video 3 (on "flipped classroom")
- Activity 9: Forum (on "inequality in education")
- Activity 10: Mid-semester assessment (Activity completed in small groups. Students were requested to visit a pre-school and make a recording of various social settings in the school and provide a critical analysis focusing on the topic 'Is a common mechanism to monitor pre-schools or early childhood development centres necessary in Sri Lanka'. Upon making the video students had to upload it to the YouTube and then submit the relevant link to the lecturer via the LMS. Training on how to do this was provided with support from the faculty LMS administrator.)
- Activity 11: Quiz 4 (MCQs on "Marxism and education")
- Activity 12: Questionnaire (student feedback on their blended learning experience)
- Activity 13: Chatroom 3 (on "Can we implement Dewey's ideas in Sri Lanka?"; discussion stimulated by using a YouTube video on John Dewey)
- Activity 14: Quiz 5 (MCQs on "the role of the teacher")

[2] Medium of instruction for a majority of the students. The other students studied in English, the language of the original Youtube video.

Quantitative data was analysed using Microsoft Excel to generate descriptive statistics and the qualitative data was subjected to a thematic analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Quantitative and qualitative data obtained from LMS logs and student feedback were analysed under the three themes mentioned below:

- Classroom VS online participation of students
- Key factors that determine students' participation in online activities
- Key challenges facing BL: Examination-oriented and teacher-centered learning

Classroom VS online participation of students

As mentioned above, for a majority of the students in the sample this was the first experience of online activities. At the beginning of the course, when the primary researcher explained that the course will be "blended", there was a considerable amount of concerns raised by the students mostly due to their lack of experience and inadequate IT competency. However, they were content with the assurance provided by the researchers that they would be offered adequate training to complete the activities. Hence the researchers were able to retain the originally enrolled number of students till the end of the course. The student numbers are sure to have dropped had they not been convinced that the researchers would support them with the required technical knowhow to complete the online activities.

As expected, student participation in the first few online activates were not encouraging. However, the situation improved overtime due to several reasons, namely provision of incentives (i.e. marks), encouragement, persuasion and training offered by the lectureres and an intrinsic interest in the activities (See Figure 1).

Figure 1 shows the increase in student participation over time. The highest participation has been recorded for the forum (94 percent) and chatroom 2 (90 percent). With the exception of the feedback questionnaire (28 percent), student participation has continued to improve with negligible fluctuation. Low participation may be related to inadequate IT competency of students (Liyanagunawardena et al. 2014a; 2014b).

Participation for quizzes and chatrooms improved after a classroom announcement that informed the students that their participation in these activities will be taken into account when awarding marks for class participation/ attendance[3]. In the case of quizzes, they were informed that mere completion of the quiz and not the mark obtained for it would be considered in awarding this mark. However, for chatrooms students were requested to 'actively' participate by contributing to the discussion in order to accumulate marks. As expected more numbers of students completed the quizzes and engaged in the chatroom discussion thereafter.

On the contrary, student attendance for face-to-face lectures was always above 90 percent. Several reasons can be thought of as contributing to this situation. Firstly, face-to-face learning is the mode familiar to the students. Secondly, the 'core' material of the course is discussed in the classroom. Thirdly, students can make their own 'note' for examination studying by listening to the teacher. Fourthly, helpful tips on completing online activities were provided during the lecture. However, their presence in the classroom was equal to mere attendance as a majority of students were not very active. The 'participation' observed for online activities was not visible in the face-to-face classroom. Students seemed 'freer' to express their views in the online setting. The physical absence of the teacher and fellow students seem to provide a 'virtual comfort zone' in which

[3] 10 percent of the final mark is awarded for class attendance as per Faculty by-laws governing the Degree programme.

students were not reluctant to express their views; a 'virtual bond' not found in the traditional classroom could be identified.

Key factors that determine students' participation in online activities

The researchers designed three types of online activities with the intention of encouraging students to critically assess their world by relating the course content to their everyday world (Eisen 2012). These activities were: 1) chatrooms; 2) forum; and 3) creation of a video. Chatrooms and the forum encouraged students to relate their subject knowledge to more general topics pertaining to school education. Likewise, a video was created by students in small groups and uploaded to the YouTube with the link being sent to the lecturer through the LMS. This was the mid-semester assignment worth 30 percent of the final mark. There was, obviously, 100 percent participation by the students and some very effective videos created by the students (evaluation by primary researcher/ lecturer) as the mid-semester assignment is a compulsory part of course assessment.

The strongest factor that determined students' participation was the award of marks. In the absence of marks, it was very difficult to encourage student participation. Low participation recorded for Quiz 1 and 2 is evidence of this trend. The background for this kind of 'desire for marks' is set by the school education system of Sri Lanka which is known to be examination-oriented, individualistic, and competitive (Karunaratne 2009; Liyanage 2008). Majority of young scholars who enter university after undergoing this competitive system during 13 years of school find it very difficult to seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Knowledge seeking is inevitably connected to obtaining marks and passing examinations. The 28% participation reorded for Activity 12 (feedback questionnaire) is proof of this trend (See Figure 1). Activity 12 was an activity for which marks could not be awarded.

Another factor that motivated student participation was the nature of activity. Chatrooms and the forum recorded the highest participation as opposed to other activities (such as quizzes) which were testing their knowledge. Discussions that took place in the chatrooms and the forum was never a 'test of knowledge'. Students were allowed to be critical about certain aspects of education and express their views freely. There was no pressure to relate one's views to theoretical underpinnings. The following quotes from chatroom 3 confirms this perception.

> *I think grades are just one type of incentive. Whereas there are other incentives that can encourage one to work and pursue education. So it is basically about how intelligence should not just be viewed in terms of book learning- intelligence is also about talent for art, music, social skills, and basically whatever creative potential you have. Intelligence in the stock sense only focuses on the IQ level of people. Whereas intelligence is a spectrum. And ultimately, the student will not be using the bookish knowledge when it comes to the everyday society. Teachers depend on a syllabus and they never try to give a creative mind to the students. So perhaps, if schools should try thinking outside the books.*
>
> ~ (Female Student, English Medium) ~

> *The education system of our country leads students to follow the existing system and it does not necessarily promote critical thinking. From school to university we are used to following rules and regulations and we do not attempt anything innovative. Therefore, this mindset should be changed and students should be encouraged think out of the box.*
>
> ~ (Female Student, Sinhala Medium) ~

However, one cannot ignore the fact that participation in chatrooms also improved after allocating marks for participation. Therefore, in the final analysis marks seem to be the strongest factor that encouraged participation in online activities.

The data also suggest that students still prefer to be 'passive' learners in spite of the lecturers' attempt to encourage active learning by way of online activities. This is confirmed by the number of students who had 'viewed' the videos. On average, the viewing percentage (76 percent) is higher than the participation percentage (70 percent) in chatrooms and the forum. Viewing does not demand critical thinking or the expression of one's views. This proves the students' desire to continue to be passive learners unless 'pushed' to

be otherwise by way of incentives. The learning culture which is examination-oriented with a dominant teacher in a traditional classroom setting seems deeply rooted in students' personalities.

Key challenges facing BL: examination-oriented and teacher-centered learning

The education system in Sri Lanka, 13 years of school and 3 or 4 years of university combined, is very examination oriented and teacher-centered. Even though students seem happy 'pursuing marks' within this system, a desire to learn free from examination stress was also expressed by some students in the feedback questionnaire. The mid-semester assignment which was the creation of a video in a small group seemed to have caught student's interest because of its non-traditional nature.

> *It was an interesting mid-semester assignment to work on. I'm happy that I had the opportunity to do some practical work (recordings, interviews etc.). … I'm glad that we had the opportunity to do it.*
>
> ~ (Female Student, English Medium) ~

> *I think it was slightly difficult and a challenging experience due to the time involved in preparation. However, once we got the hang of it, we were able to find new ways to work together as a group and it helped us revise the topics learnt in the course.*
>
> ~ (Male Student, Sinhala Medium) ~

However, a significant portion (36 percent) of students had negative attitudes about the mid-semester assignment. Their negative evaluation was based on factors such as difficulties of making a video and lack of technical knowhow required. Sitting for an examination paper was considered a better alternative. By opting for this kind of traditional, familiar and therefore 'safe' assessment techniques, students lose out on what can be learned by engaging in technology-based innovative assessment methods. For example, students would not have had the opportunity to learn how to make and edit a video using their smartphone if not for this activity. Without such exposure students continue to be constrained to book learning or rote learning (Delialioğlu, 2012).

The study revealed an overwhelming preference for in-class teaching instead of online. Considerable number (53 percent) of students were keen about face-to-face classroom activities including lectures as this is the form of teaching instilled in them over a long period of time.

> *Students are happy to listen to the lecturer and reproduce most of what has been taught in the class at a semester-end examination. They seem to enjoy 'cramming' few days ahead of the examination. Many students were unaware of how to respond to an opportunity for free expression of views through a chatroom or a forum.*
>
> ~ (Field notes kept by primary researcher, 2019) ~

Allocation of marks could 'pull' students out of this unawareness. The word 'pull' is used here to indicate the fact that students' reaction may not always be voluntary. It is important to note here that allocating marks for expressing one's views can only be done on an online platform. It is meaningless and impossible to try and award marks for students who speak up in class. As a result, the classroom continues to be teacher-centered in spite of a blended approach to teaching and learning. Therefore, it is correct to conclude that only online activities have the capacity to encourage students' active participate in a discussion. The physical absence of a teacher, whose 'authority' students have been taught (through 13 years of school) not to challenge in class (Lakshman 2015), undoubtedly contributes to this online engagement by students.

Students face number of problems with regard to using IT technologies that they are not familiar with and their lack of English language proficiency (Liyanagunawardena et al. 2014a; 2014b). These reasons also contribute towards their preference for a traditional teacher-centered classroom setting. English proficiency becomes an issue because almost all of the prescribed readings are available only in English. Being unable to acquire additional knowledge from these readings make the students very passive in class. Students become reluctant to engage in classroom discussions merely by expressing their views, as was possible during the

chatrooms. Students found the traditional classroom easy to manage than seeking knowledge themselves. Therefore, there is a tendency for the teaching and learning process to continue to be teacher-centered.

However, it is noteworthy that the students have understood the need for becoming familiar with these new teaching and learning methods which depend on technology as an important factor for becoming effective scholars.

> *I think that the idea of a dual learning process (a process where teacher and student both contribute to learning) is important, because usually we feel that the power hierarchy means that we are less significant in the learning process.*
>
> ~ (Female Student, English Medium) ~

> *I think it is good to have online activities and in class teachings at the same time, because online activities were very helpful to apply subject content that we have learned during our on-campus lectures. This was truly different from our other courses and it was a new experience to all of us. It is good that we could participate in online discussions as well.*
>
> ~ (Female Student, Sinhala Medium) ~

Conclusion

The present study explored the possibility of making a 'usually' teacher-centered classroom more student-centered by way of adopting a blended mode of teaching. The study sample consisted of 50 3rd Year students following a sociology of education course at the UNIVRSITY OF COLOMBO, Sri Lanka. As part of the research project, 14 online activities were introduced in addition to the core teaching that took place in the classroom.

The study reveals a tendency among students to prefer a teacher-centered approach to teaching and learning as they were more familiar with such an approach. The traditional classroom setting does not demand the active participation of students. More importantly the authority attributed to the teacher within the classroom is a significant part of the teaching-learning culture of the country. Throughout 13 years of schooling, Sri Lankan students are conditioned to believe that their passive contribution to learning is desired. Students are almost shocked when they are demanded to become active learners upon entering university. Another important element of the teaching-learning culture is the examination-oriented learning that takes place. Being passive in class does not inhibit students' ability to get through examinations in anyway.

The strongest challenges encountered during this project were related to the above. Even though there were concerns about students' lack of English language proficiency and technical knowhow raised, they could be overcome by using translations and by providing training on how to complete online tasks. Infrastructural issues pertaining to devices and access to internet were not present as these facilities were available in the university computer laboratories.

The above points raised about the teaching-learning culture of the country were strategically used to promote students' active participation in the online activities. The low participation experienced during the first few online activities was successfully overcome by awarding marks for their contribution (using the "examination-orientedness" to promote active participation) and through teacher intervention (using "teacher-centeredness" to promote active participation). While a considerable number of students had enjoyed the opportunity offered to become actively engaged in their learning, many others seemed to have become active as there was no other option available.

Accepted models of BL might see the above approach as 'pressurizing' students to become actively engaged in their learning. It might be seen as 'involuntary' active participation. However, as a country in the very initial stages of moving into BL learning (or online teaching as is the case currently under Covid19), particularly in the teaching of humanities and social sciences, it is imperative that a solution is sought within the current practices

of teaching and learning. Once the students are 'pulled into' these new practices, they will replace the current traditional beliefs instilled in students' and teachers' minds. Once it is successfully made part of the new teaching-learning culture students will no longer feel pressured into it and will voluntarily explore the opportunities provided for active participation in learning.

The present study brings much promise to the teaching of sociology under the 'new normal' brought in by Covid19. Instead of BL, students are now made to study fully online. The present study offers the possibility of developing a new teaching-learning culture by way of extracting the key elements of the teaching-learning culture currently in practice. The resulting new teaching-learning culture is likely to suit the socio-economic and cultural makeup of the country.

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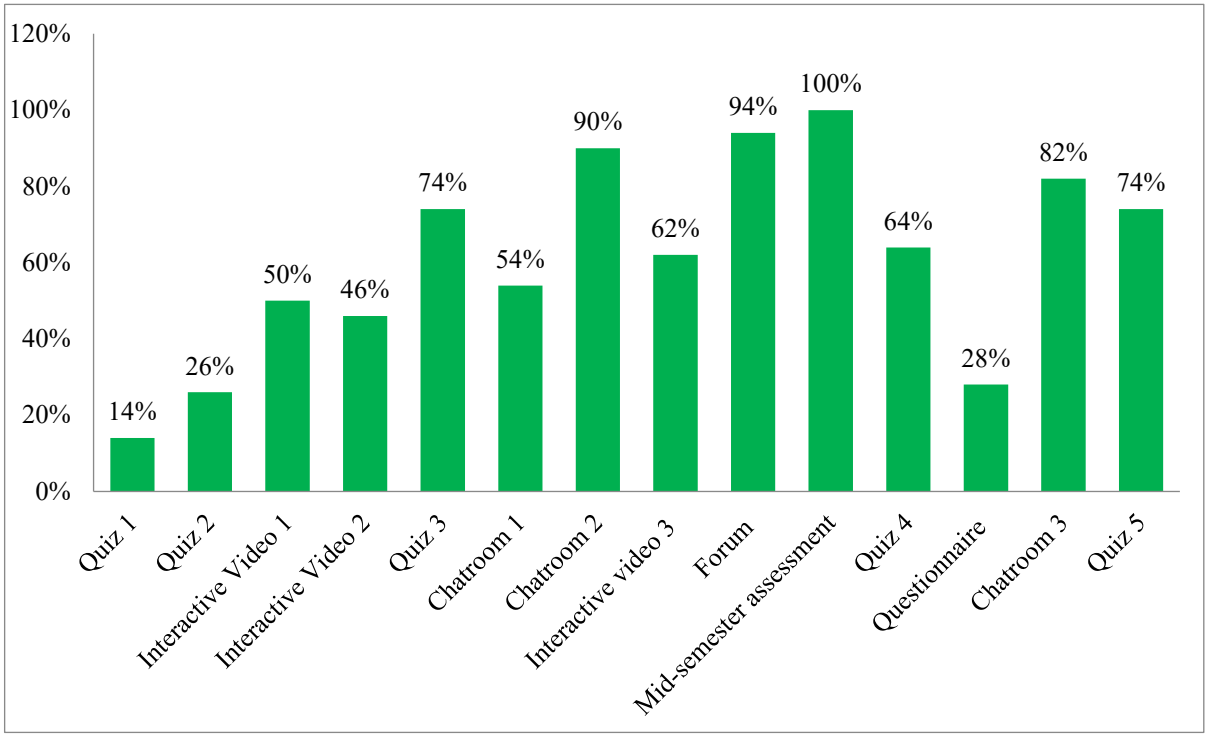
Figure 1: Student Participation in Online Activities



Source: Survey data, 2019

THEME 2. NEW QUALITY AGENDAS FOR EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Relationship building to Strengthen Indigenous Authority in Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The Ontario College Quality Assurance Service sought to inform changes to their quality assurance process based on Indigenous Knowledges. The experience of engaging in discussion with Indigenous educators changed the approach, and refocused the efforts from knowledge building toward relationship building. The establishment of an Indigenous Thought Leaders Circle has laid a foundation, from which trust can be established to inform the quality assurance process. Sharing stories from both sides of the conversation, this presentation will provide learning that can assist other jurisdictions in their journey toward reconciliation with Indigenous people through higher education quality assurance.

Introduction

Over the last twenty years, there have been many political, economic and social changes that have affected called for change, including to institutions of higher education. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) completed consultations and published a multi-volume report regarding a 6-year process of listening to Aboriginal people about the impact of the Residential School system (TRC, 2015). This TRC report includes calling Canadians into a process of reconciliation with the Indigenous people of Canada, including a list of ninety-four (94) Calls to Action. The Preface to the Executive Summary of the TRC report succinctly summarizes the importance of all engaging in a process of Reconciliation. "Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one. Virtually all aspects of Canadian society may need to be reconsidered." (TRC, Executive Summary, 2015, pg iv). The TRC calls to action explicitly ask Canadian government, institutions and people to take action to "…redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, 2015, pg 1).

Recognizing that as part of the system of post-secondary education in Ontario the OCQAS was responsible to take action considering the TRC Calls to Action to actively engage in reconciliation. Therefore, in 2018 the OCQAS started a project to work toward reconciliation through review of the quality assurance processes we oversee. This project was partially funded by the INQAAHE Capacity Building fund (Agreement # 2019-IFS-202) under the title "Truth and Reconciliation in Quality Assurance" (TRiQA).

This paper will discuss the evolution of TRiQA project from a non-Indigenous led limited-time project, to the establishment of an on-going relationship to facilitate sharing of Indigenous peoples' experiences through the quality assurance processes in the Ontario college sector. Results of these relationships, as well as future directions suggest that steps toward reconciliation can strengthen the quality assurance processes, while building and strengthening relationships on a "basis of inclusion, mutual understanding, and respect" (TRC Executive Summary, 2015, page 23).

Context

The OCQAS is responsible for providing objective quality assurance services to our stakeholders, including the 24 colleges across the province of Ontario. In turn, each of these colleges is accountable to their stakeholders: students, employers and regional communities. The demographics vary, based on college location, although all colleges participate in the OCQAS College Quality Assurance Audit Process (CQAAP) which has been facilitated through OCQAS since 2005. Therefore, the CQAAP is in place to demonstrate the colleges' accountability to the citizens of Ontario. To date, the CQAAP has been developed, and evaluated against, traditional models of postsecondary education quality assurance.

Currently, most of the active stakeholders for the CQAAP are employees or administrators of the twenty-four (24) Ontario public colleges. This audit process requires each college to develop a self-report, which engages academic and support units to gather and reflect on evidence to support their quality assurance processes. Although, at this time, the standards and requirements have been developed, over time, based on historic QA in postsecondary education institutions and systems. Recently, there have been significant initiatives to recognize the autonomy of Indigenous people in Ontario to be responsible for post-secondary education.

In 2017, the Province of Ontario enacted the Indigenous Institutes Act, in the spirit of reconciliation (Indigenous Act, 2017). With this law, the Province "acknowledges that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes the right of Indigenous peoples to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning." (Indigenous Act, 2017, pg 1). Under this Act, quality assurance for Indigenous Institutes is managed by the Indigenous Advance Education and Skills Council (IAESC). This is consistent with how other postsecondary education institutions in Ontario must adhere to appropriate legislation for defining and delivering their credentials.

Early in 2018, a group of northern colleges published "Building a Strong Fire: Indigenous Quality Assurance Standards (IQAS) for Ontario Colleges" (2018). The project was funded by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) then called the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD), and represented a three-year collaboration amongst Indigenous leaders, knowledge keepers and quality assurance representatives from the six public northern colleges. The proposed implementation of the IQAS is through an audit process which would be conducted in parallel to the current CQAAP.

The people involved in these two recent developments have been in conversation with OCQAS, as the IAESC and the IQAS have come into being. The difference between these relationships is that the IAESC is a peer QA organization in the province, while the implementation of the IQAS will be done at colleges, in parallel to the CQAAP, which increases the workload on colleges by under-going two independent audits. During TRiQA, we were briefing peer QA organizations, including the director and staff at IAESC, as the project evolved.

TRiQA Project – Theoretical View

The Truth and Reconciliation in Quality Assurance (TRiQA) project was proposed as an opportunity for OCQAS to engage in the important work of reconciliation, and to inform, rather than add to, current quality assurance practices of colleges. The major goal of TRiQA was to evolve the process, standards and requirements of CQAAP to benefit from the wisdom of an approach based on wholism (Absolon, 2010). As stated in the project proposal, "In the spirit of reconciliation, this project is aiming to strengthen the current CQAAP process through changes based on the Indigenous perspectives." (TRiQA Proposal, 2018).

The foundation of reconciliation is building and relying on relationships amongst the people and system for quality assurance and the Indigenous people that have been systematically excluded from establishing that system. It was the intention of OCQAS, when initiating TRiQA to strengthen the quality assurance system and CQAAP by integrating a wholistic approach, represented in writings by Indigenous scholars including Jo-Ann Archibald (1993 and 1996), Jim Dumont (2002), Kathy Absolon (2010).

The TRiQA Methodology was planned to consist of activities (illustrated in Figure 1) which are both grounded in and provide support for the relationship building required for reconciliation:

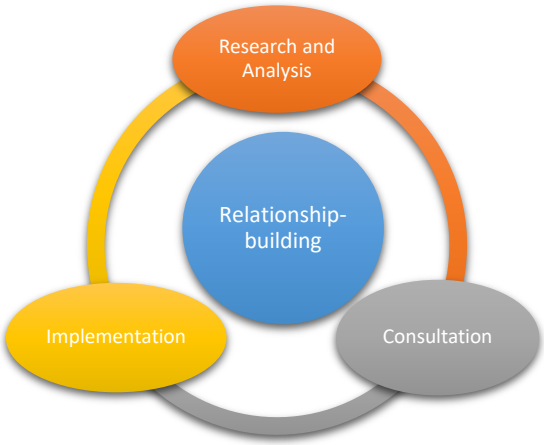
- Research/Analysis
- Consultation
- Implementation

This framework is general in approach, as the conversations and relationships are integral in defining the path forward, collaboratively.

There were two principles that were kept in mind, as we developed the project, to be respectful of Indigenous people in two ways: not asking Indigenous people to do the work to fix the system, and also to involve them enough to not leave them out of the decision-making process ("not about us, without us"). All the while following a deductive research approach.

The cycle shown in Figure 1, was to be completed in each of three phases of the project, iteratively engaging different groups of stakeholders in the consultation aspect: Indigenous scholars, Quality Assurance specialists in the Ontario Colleges, and OCQAS Management Board. We envisioned that the project would result in both a theoretical model of how Indigenous ways of knowing are (and could be) represented in quality assurance processes, as well as the implementation of recommended changes to integrate wholistic models of knowing, as described by Indigenous scholars, into the CQAAP to be used by all Ontario Colleges. A complementary goal of the project was to be the development of relationships between the OCQAS stakeholders and Indigenous people to support future conversations and consultations regarding postsecondary education quality assurance.

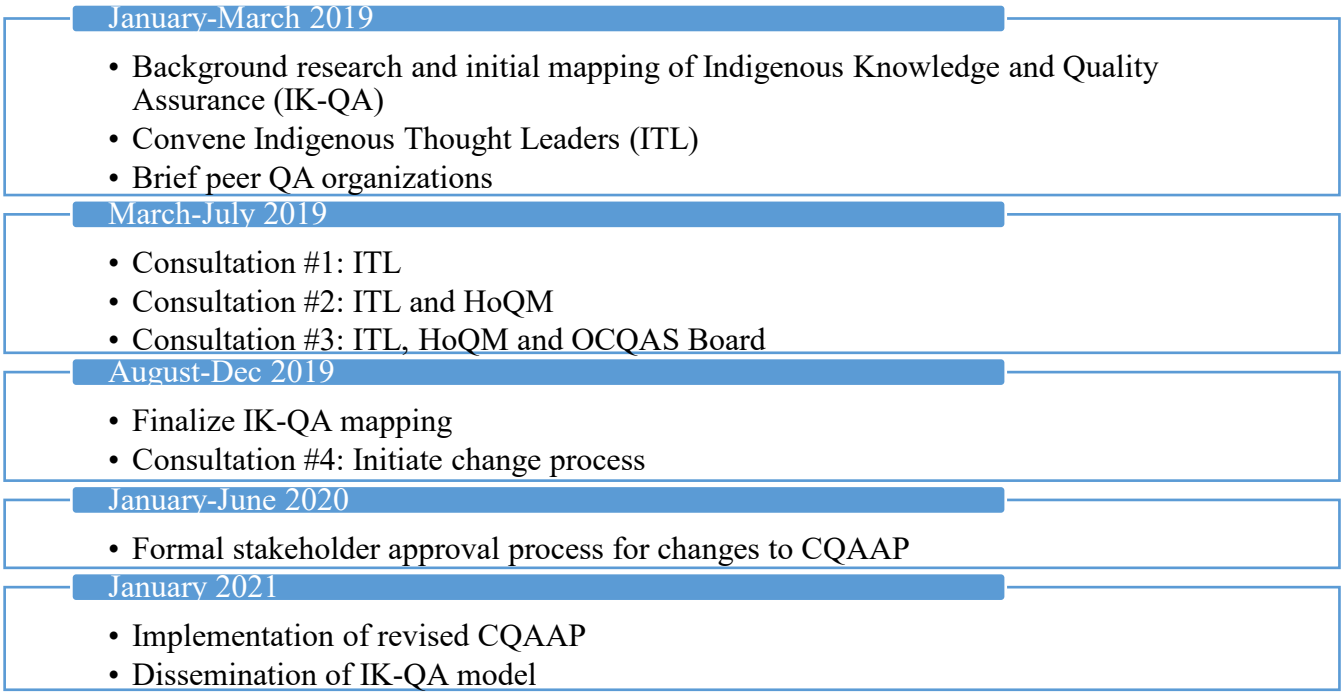
Figure 1: Truth and Reconciliation in Quality Assurance (TRiQA) project framework



TRiQA Project – Realistic View

The TRiQA project was expected to unfold with 2019 to be the year of developing and gaining consensus for the model of the influence of Indigenous ways of knowing on quality assurance (IK-QA) through the consultative process with the stakeholders. The cyclical flow of how the project was to unfold is shown in Figure 2. Prior to each of the consultations planned during March-July 2019, research and analysis would be completed to inform the discussion and allow the stakeholders to shape the information to be discussed in subsequent consultations.

Figure 2: Proposed timeline for TRiQA activities



Project Challenges

As the project got underway in early 2019, the principles of relationship-building and consultation were primary. This meant that the actual tasks and activities changed, based on information gained from the consultations.

From a process perspective, group consultations seemed like the best approach, to allow for an integrated discussion and response. Although scheduling, including travel (1-2 days return) for a day-long meeting proved to be very difficult. Therefore, we added two steps of consultation to the initial part of the project: an on-line survey of selected Indigenous people involved in Ontario postsecondary education followed by short in-person discussions with these individuals. The information gathered through these additional steps was invaluable in making decisions about the next step moving forward on the 'building relationships' process. Table 1 summarizes the key pieces of feedback that were received through consultation with Indigenous educators, as well as way that the approach to this project has been changed, due to those perspectives.

Table 1 – Summary of results from IPEC and ITL consultations

Initial Approach	Feedback	Revised Approach
Mapping of QA process with Indigenous ways of knowing (Deductive/Theoretical approach)	The process of decolonization can't happen through a colonized (non-Indigenous) process	Draw connections between real experiences of Indigenous educators which can be included in Quality Assurance process (Inductive/Experience-based approach)
ITL and HoQM consulted as stakeholders	Project should have Indigenous leadership (aligned with question of authentic leadership, above)	Increase involvement of ITL in project leadership
		Regularly report back to IPEC and HoQM

ITL membership of college- and non-college Indigenous Thought Leaders	TRiQA should be college-focused	ITL membership of college-based Indigenous educators
TRiQA project with defined start and end dates (2019-2021)	Relationship-building is an on-going process	ITL Circle established as a persistent advisory group to OCQAS and connection between OCQAS and IPEC

Through the preliminary conversations with Indigenous Thought Leaders (ITL), an invitation was received to present the TRiQA project to the provincial Indigenous People's Education Circle (IPEC). This organization is made up of advocates for Indigenous education from Indigenous communities and Ontario colleges. Meeting with IPEC significantly changed the direction and definition of the ITL. The IPEC felt strongly that the ITL should be comprised of Indigenous educators from Colleges. We took this as a major recommendation and organized a consultation meeting with a selected group of Indigenous educators from IPEC. Furthermore, IPEC also questioned the non-Indigenous leadership for such a project.

Another piece of feedback which emerged from the preliminary consultations was that the proposed approach to the project was based on a paradigm from a colonized perspective. By expecting the project to follow a deductive manner, based on establishing a model by deconstructing Indigenous ways of knowing was in direct conflict with the principles of wholism that are part of the culture and worldview of many Indigenous peoples. When the colonized perspectives on which the work was grounded was initially identified, by Indigenous educators and colleagues, it was difficult for non-Indigenous project leaders to resolve how to move forward. And, reconciliation must be based on relationships. Therefore, as the project progressed, the project changed based on input and relationships with the Indigenous educators in the Ontario college system.

Short-term Accomplishments

The first gathering of the college-focused ITL was convened, face-to-face, in February 2020. At this meeting was when group became identified as the Indigenous Thought Leaders Circle (ITL Circle). The meeting was a first step, and included an opportunity for all members (five Indigenous Thought Leaders and two OCQAS representatives) to hear each other's stories. This process continued the relationship building which was started individually during the preliminary consultations. Another part of the meeting was to review the intentions of the standards and requirements of the CQAAP and discuss experiences of Indigenous students, educators and communities which could be reflected within each of them. From this discussion, there have been three requirements in the CQAAP for which Indigenous peoples' experiences could be highlighted as guiding information or evidence for compliance.

Following this initial meeting, the ITL Circle has developed Terms of Reference document which to explicitly define the expectations of the membership. The Terms of Reference include identifying an ITL Circle Co-chair, to facilitate the group and provide a direct channel to and from IPEC. Furthermore, the decision-making criteria was identified as consensus-based. It was also after this first meeting, that the OCQAS Executive Director identified that the ITL Circle should be established as an on-going advisory group to the OCQAS.

Current Approach

The TRiQA project was transformed from a project (with a definite start and end) focused on the development of a model and suggesting short-term change into an on-going activity within which OCQAS is actively involved in growing the relationship with the ITL Circle and IPEC to affect longer term change in quality assurance in the Ontario colleges. Developing these relationships requires people to listen to each other, and

work together to explore and develop trust. By developing a level of trust in each other, it is the intention, that learning with the ITL Circle and OCQAS is bi-directional:

- OCQAS representatives are learning from and about Indigenous knowledge through the stories and experiences of Indigenous students, administrators, educators and community members.
- ITL Circle members are learning about the quality assurance processes of the colleges and higher education.

These learnings can then be brought together to strengthen both the quality assurance processes, as well as address systemic issues in higher education which have disadvantaged Indigenous people. Furthermore, the on-going work of the ITL Circle provides a persistent channel of communication to and from IPEC, as well as serving as an advisory group to OCQAS.

Over the past year (2020), in the midst of a global pandemic, the work of the ITL Circle with OCQAS has been acknowledged to be important and significant. For example, there have been three changes to the Ontario College Quality Assurance Audit Process documentation recommended by the ITL Circle. These changes were approved by the IPEC, recognized by the OCQAS Management Board, and published on the website in November 2020. Therefore, they are now available to be used by Ontario colleges initiating their quality audits in 2021. Furthermore, during a virtual "tour of campuses" completed by the OCQAS Executive Director and Board Chair during the last half of 2020, most of the College Presidents shared positive and supportive comments on the work that OCQAS was doing in collaboration with the Indigenous Peoples' Education Circle (IPEC). In turn, the enhanced Indigenous presence in the Ontario College system quality assurance processes was well received.

The work with the ITL Circle continues in both concrete and exploratory ways. In addition to discussing how more CQAAP standards and requirements could be altered or augmented to better represent Indigenous peoples' experiences, we are also exploring a process of story sharing and narrative as evidence for change in the QA system. Sharing stories can be a powerful tool for making systemic change, although the cost to the individual story-teller must not be under-valued. In some cases, sharing one's story can make one vulnerable or contribute to the trauma of a life-experience. Therefore, it is important for the ITL Circle to work with OCQAS on exploring safe and respectful ways of sharing stories that can be used as evidence for transformative change in the quality assurance process. It is through respectful listening and learning to each other, we are building trust and new perspectives into the quality assurance processes and documentation.

Conclusion

The TRiQA project was initially envisioned as a process of consulting with stakeholders, gradually adding the groups together to be transparent and inclusive in communication. This could be described as concentric circles, getting bigger as stakeholder groups are added to the process (Figure 3a). Through this project, the process of reconciliation has transformed the initiative into active exploration of how experiences of Indigenous people can help to inform the quality assurance process, and be in on-going relationship with the OCQAS. Therefore, the activities of reconciliation can now be more accurately depicted as a growing tree, with roots growing down representing the relationships and the branches reaching up representing the changes and new understandings (Figure 3b). Moving from a metaphor of the rings of the tree (which can only be seen when the tree is cut down) to the living tree, strongly depicts the on-going, living and growing relationships with which the OCQAS and the ITL Circle are undertaking to strengthen quality assurance in the Ontario college sector through the learning and teachings of Indigenous peoples' knowledge and experiences.

Figure 3 – TRiQA model of consultation and collaboration changing to a dynamic model of relationship and change

Figure 3a

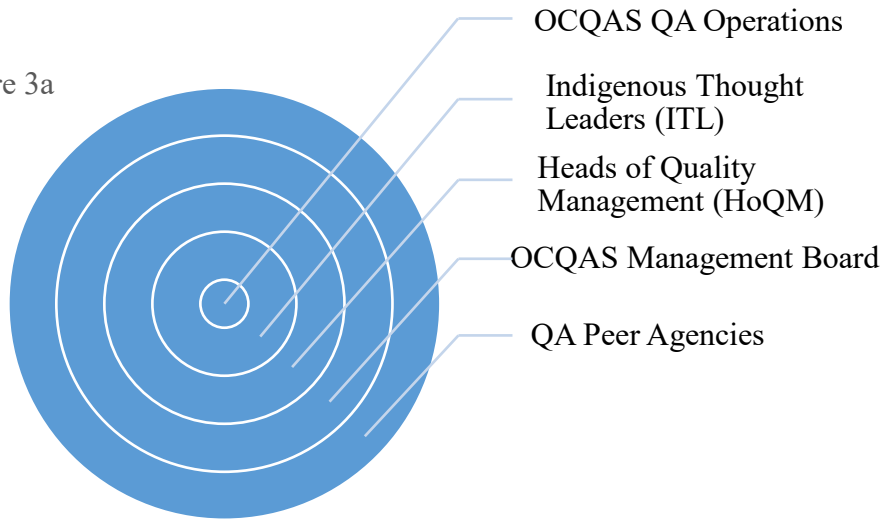
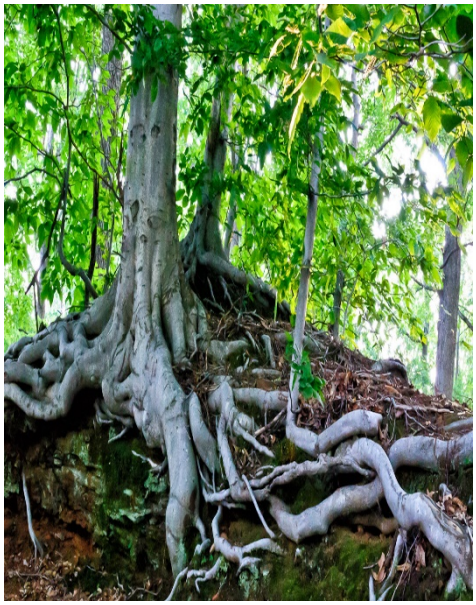


Figure 3b



The work of the quality assurance in higher education is a journey of continuous improvement, and learning. Just as the work of reconciliation with Indigenous people is a process of relationship-building. Although the TRiQA project started from assumptions and set goals of making change in a particular way, the relationships developed along the way have transformed the processes. Therefore, this work of trust building and learning will continue, and important work is yet to come.

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Regulating quality for global hybrid higher education

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the time has come to design new forms of quality assurance for global hybrid higher education, and it frames necessary steps ahead. Prevailing approaches are unable to deal with digital futures, transforming transnational provision, and new learner segments and service partnerships. Without reform, quality assurance arrangements will lack relevance to higher education and the communities it serves. The paper articulates the focus, functioning and positioning of quality assurance suited to global hybrid higher education.

Keywords: *regulation, governance, quality, global*

Designing global quality architectures

This paper argues that the time has come to design new forms of quality assurance for global hybrid higher education, and it frames necessary steps ahead. Prevailing approaches are unable to deal with digital futures, transforming transnational provision, and new learner segments and service partnerships. Without reform, quality assurance arrangements will lack relevance to higher education and the communities it serves.

An assumption underpinning the paper is that the 'norm core' has been stretched, and it has snapped. Novel circumstances signal the need for new regulatory perspectives, partnerships, practices. More nuanced strategies are required which take into consideration multiple, complex and emerging issues that impact higher education. One perspective is not enough and there is no longer a reliable lever to pull that guarantees prosperity in a post-pandemic world. Governments, regulators and university governing bodies need a coherent strategy that takes into consideration local economies, emerging technology, local and international regulations, geo-politics and transnational relationships, evolved teaching and learning styles and graduate prospects. Clear pointers will be required to help institutions navigate the road ahead.

To venture in this direction, this paper begins with a sketch of 'global hybrid higher education' and defines key qualities which distinguish this new era. Three innovative case studies are presented to give life to the multifaceted transformations underway. The paper provokes the need to reflect on quality assurance, asserts the need to design new globally oriented systems, and sketches key facets of the required architecture.

Global hybrid higher education

Global hybrid higher education is distinguished by the use of campus and online platforms to connect teachers and learners on a global basis, crossing borders, and cultivating globally relevant capabilities. This broad definition includes the 'broad tent' of transnational, international, online and open education. It is increasingly characterised by multipolar global arrangements, post-institutional and post-system arrangements, diversified public-private arrangements, hybrid experiences and granular forms of provision, and construction of complex credentials which emphasise social value and contribution.

The 2020 shock accelerated the need to start making better sense of this emerging online global era. For instance, little is known about how university managers can support hundreds of globally distributed faculty who are delivering top-end education to globally distributed students. While it spawns 'big data', we know little about the quality of online education. We know even less about how countries, universities and families

will distribute time and money across physical, technological, and intercontinental platforms. It remains unclear whether countries will reform to embrace smaller online parcels of learning. Early signs suggest that the online global era will blend campuses, travel, and computers in surprising and innovative ways.

Three case studies give life to these ideas, characterising global shifts, institutional reforms, and new private engagements. Rather than tease these out through a regulatory or quality lens, it is helpful to take a broader view on the multidimensional transformations underway.

Global shifts are disrupting transnational arrangements and spurring digital interconnections. Since the mid-1990s, wealthy western economies have relied on exporting higher education to sustain local and national systems. This model has been stretched over the last decade. Now, and coupled with COVID, the cracks are beginning to show. Many Asian countries have already developed mature higher education systems with stable governance, young homegrown faculty, established career tracks and multi-layered partnerships. Regional university brands are growing in step with resilient post-pandemic economies and, while prestigious western brands retain their edge, stickiness will be tempered in coming years. China, already the world's biggest system, is introducing sector-wide reforms that acknowledge this burgeoning new global era where the importing and exporting patterns of higher education are being inversed. This includes globally relevant reforms regarding foreign teachers, innovative structures for transnational education, and guidelines for accelerating the reform of graduate education. Such developments have an overarching impact on higher education worldwide, challenge existing quality systems, and have been the focus of deep analysis and debate.

Even the most prestigious institutions are changing. In late January 2020, after appraising the growing viral epidemic and following ministry guidance, Tsinghua University's leaders decided to move all coursework online. In early February they gave the 'initial class' to around 5,000 faculty and 50,000 students spread across every time zone and continent. Over the next few weeks, teachers adjusted home studios, polished dust from web cams, obsessed briefly about online teaching tactics, and dived into the new era of global online higher education. In the following semester, over 4,000 courses were taught online by around 2,700 faculty to 25,000 students spanning every time zone and dozens of countries. Though most students returned to campus for the following semester, many international students remained outside China. As well, many Chinese students destined for elite foreign universities were supported at Tsinghua, studying online. Nearly all of this change was unprecedented not just at Tsinghua but in China and across Asia, provoking intriguing quality questions. A substantial research project was launched to study these shifts and understand the multidimensional shifts of Tsinghua 'into the cloud'.

New student and financial flows are emerging, spurring novel partnerships not just within institutions but also between institutions and the wider world. In April 2020, for instance, a remarkable deal was inked in the middle of tumbling markets and closing doors. China's leading private higher education company became a long-term partner of Richmond, The American University in London. This non-profit liberal arts university became able to offer dual accredited United Kingdom and United States qualifications. The new deal promised to expand and amplify student pipelines and pathways. It provided the private higher education company with an additional institutional footprint in two key foreign markets. Similar deals have been struck between the Galileo Global Education and the private Regent's University London, and between Strategic Education and Torrens University. These private higher education investment firms span dozens of countries and institutions, and many hundreds of thousands of faculty and students. They challenge assumptions which undergird conventional assumptions about quality, yet remain remarkably understudied.

Sketching parameters and directions

Such arrangements represent the future, a future with deep connected channels and deep relationships across global markets, between organizations committed to quality education, and bringing old and new world assets to the table. Such developments challenge traditional forms of quality assurance, however, which are nationally oriented, peer-based and not grounded in objective standards. Prevailing arrangements seem

neither sound, sufficient nor sustainable. Currently, as experts note, "there is no coherent governance framework for the global higher education system" (Van Damme & van der Wende, 2018: 106).

Substantial transformation is required to make progress, involving innovative re-design of quality assurance. Big questions need to be asked. What is a useful means of regulating these emerging arrangements? How best to regulate future higher education spaces? How can education quality be assured in relevant and consequential ways? A higher education free-for-all serves no-one. Countries, institutions and professions need a means of ensuring education characteristics and outcomes.

What appear to be the key normative and practical features of effective future quality assurance? Much can be gleaned from analysis of existing systems, sector-specific and more general research, and the failure or challenges of regulatory practice (Bevir & Hall, 2011; Bevir, 2011; Hazelkorn, Coates & McCormick, 2018; Coates & Mahat, 2014). This balance of this paper contributes findings drawn from substantial research, consultation and publication in the last five years which has sought to articulate a roadmap which clarifies parameters and sketches directions ahead.

The 2020 crisis has made clear the need for courageous redesign of certain education fundamentals. We have felt pandemic-induced health and economic shocks rupture universities worldwide. We have watched major institutional and academic fissures erupt along fault lines which have been cracking for decades. We've observed a flourishing of novel forays into feasible, fanciful, and formidable futures, each underpinned by 'theoretical framings', 'robust evidence' and 'decades of experience'. We have puzzled as seemingly major universities have, after only a few months of fiscal turbulence, been caught swimming naked. The game has changed. A moment has arisen, it seems, to design future quality assurance.

Given such turbulence and uncertainty, what appear to be the key normative and practical features of effective future regulation? Regulators must have the same scope and scale as the institutions being regulated. There is little use in a regulator which is unable to impose powerful and timely constraints. Regulation must have the expertise and reach to cover a very wide range of educational practices. Regulation must be sufficiently borderless or post-systemic, though not necessarily post-national. Much education activity extends beyond system boundaries, such as student recruitment, borderless learning, and graduate destinations. Even in the most global countries and sectors, and even after suffering policy neglect, there is declining interest in any diminution of national power. Geopolitical developments are fuelling nationalism, though simultaneously awareness of the limits of national steering mechanisms. Regulation must be sensitive to and encourage diverse fields, disciplines and institutions. It must be equal to private and public institutions, including to invisible partnerships. There is no point in regulation which stifles growth or experimentation, encouraging isomorphism and workarounds instead. One approach to this is to articulate minimal governance provisions which leave much up the practical imagination of educators, policymakers and managers. As much as possible, regulation must be based on generalisable, verifiable and relevant evidence. This instils a need for the collection and reporting of assured information. Global reputation research rankings have grown to play a role in this regard, but inter- and supra-governmental organisations surely have a much larger role to play. Systems and institutions must have confidence in the legitimacy of regulatory institutions, actors, processes, information and outcome. This is hard in an era in which even global institutions are suffering critique and generational reform, though perhaps feasible to achieve within a specific sector. Ultimately, the regulator has oversight across education and research outcomes, though little responsibility or authority.

Unsurprisingly, a number of familiar actors are likely to play a role in future governance. Academic autonomy has a primary role to play. Self-regulation is the foundation pillar in most professions and higher education serves as the foundations of these, amplifying the importance of professional trust. Governments are important, as the largest ultimate owners, clients and consumers of higher education. Government interests may be pressed directly, or via quality or regulatory agencies. Networks of regulatory agencies have been established which fulfil important benchmarking roles. A range of supra-governmental agencies like OECD, UNESCO, ASEAN and APEC exert soft power through peer influence, non-binding standard setting, and other mechanisms. Institutional, research and education networks are important. There is a plethora of these, ranging from management benchmarking networks and alliances, scientific communities and authorities, and

discipline and professional networks. Industry and professional organisations, including accreditation associations, provide an important additional and triangulating form of governance. They are often global and substantially cross-latticed through research and applied experts. Commercial players have grown to play a prominent role in pseudo-regulation of the quasi-market, examples being the boards of commercial service firms, commercial rankings firms, big tech, and the media.

An evolving array of regulatory activities have erupted as higher education has grown globally and unshackled itself from earlier national regulation. There seems no shortage of regulation, and existing activities may be overlapping and even redundant. Still, important elements are missed, such as regulation of international student agents. Other elements are resource demanding, such as the international peer review of faculty. Very few people appear to read quality audit reports, including even faculty and students with a keen interest in a university's performance. Progressive facets of regulation, particularly in the area of research and social impact evaluation, can take up to a decade to bear fruit, raising questions about responsiveness and relevance. Countries and universities set targets around student equity and affirmative action in ways which are inconsistent and paradoxical across borders. With the exception of language testing and specific in certain professional fields, even similar universities fall back on quite different admissions information and standards. Price transparency is weak or non-existent, even within countries and particularly in terms of the real cost of education and other living and travel expenses. Scientific review systems have substantial power yet sit outside most formal regulatory mechanisms, increasingly in the hands of a small group of global publishers. It is really hard even to find basic institutional information on universities such as student and faculty numbers. Public-facing websites flourished over the last decade with the intent of trying to curate and inform potential student markets, though these failed to gain traction and yield the aspired-for impact. Many of these problems can be solved by the kinds of innovation explored in this book. Still, there remains a need to bring relevant pieces together in ways that make sense to the main protagonists such as universities, governments, learners, business and employers.

There is a need for regulatory coherence. A single global entity is unlikely to have the scope or momentum to prevail in a fracturing global environment. The demise of the OECD's IMHE, which delivered important agenda-setting, evaluation dissemination functions, signalled the difficulty of compressing diverse and conflicting interests into a single structure. UNESCO, via IAU and other agencies might appear to deliver in this regard, though it does so through retreat to the untouchable ethers of ultra-high policy. Hazelkorn's (2020) more recent call for an "international assembly for higher education and global science" would appear to honour existing arrangements in efficient ways and fill a governance void with formal recognition of "an interconnected web of governments, policy-makers, non-state and societal actors, universities and other higher education institutions and academics and researchers working across and within formal, informal and non-formal arrangements" (Hazelkorn, 2020). Engaging the world's more prominent universities and systems in this form of international assembly would do much to advance contemporary higher education.

Taking stock

Anyone who works in higher education knows it is not business as usual. Centuries of scholarly tradition have been swayed by ascendant managerial rituals fuelled by reductive quantitative narratives about the presumed competitive practices that are required to succeed. A pandemic has cleared campuses globally and compelled universities and faculty to underwrite radically alternative ways to proceed. Demographic shifts have expanded waves of baby-boomer retirements in developed countries and swollen doctoral cohorts in fast developing countries. Altered financial flows have grown in significance, most particularly via widespread declines in public investment, geopolitical rebalancing, and emerging sources of private finance. After decades of hyperbole, advanced computing technologies have wrapped well-financed tentacles around core facets of discovery and learning. Perhaps most broadly, the role of higher education in community life has changed, with the sector gatekeeping the bachelor credentials which serve as passports to professional work, and the doctoral training creating the technologies that advance the forefronts of geopolitical development.

Change on such scale emphasises simple, grand and often highly personal questions. What, where and how much should people study? Where and how should industries partner in research? How do universities contribute to different communities? What does higher education cost, and what are its returns? How such questions are answered varies markedly around the world. But even though higher education research in its current form is little more than a generation old, and even though academic scholarship can stake claims at being eternally relative, there is no reason why such profound questions should not be defined in reasonably consistent, specific and transparent ways. Yet answering such questions seems harder than ever before even, and perhaps especially, for experts. This paper has advanced ideas on redesigning future regulation and assurance as a means for understanding contemporary practice, and perhaps more importantly for guiding future growth.

Most broadly, therefore, the paper affirms the opportunity and need to invest in higher education design. New perspectives and narratives would be required to help learners, teachers, institutions and governments navigate the emerging economy. There was a need to clarify core aspects of academic work such as faculty roles, learner demographics, and social contributions. There was a need to report academic work to the public in more accessible and engaging ways. With economic headwinds looming, to sustain growth, more must be done to report and affirm higher education's value and contribution. Rather than swoon over bibliometrics, we saw the need to help universities find a way to prove how they add distinctive value by producing talented graduates, promoting innovation, impacting communities, and creating sustainable societies. A huge amount of work would be required to define these frontiers, enchant university presidents, and reform practices.

Indeed, studying higher education in 2020 has emboldened people's sense of the urgency for articulating and advancing research into higher education design. As Coates (2020) articulates, this important design work needs to skip beyond dystopian anxieties which underpin much discourse about higher education, and instead imagine, prototype, and build future higher education. This work must avoid tinkering around delicate scholarly debates and instead advance important innovation frontiers. In times of financial stress there is a need, for instance, to implement more productive teaching and learning arrangements. There is a related but distinct need to reform doctoral education in ways that ensure that graduates are ready for professional academic work. The governance and financing of systems and institutions needs rethinking, shifting into line with new global spaces and flows. Undoubtedly, more attention must be paid to cultivating the next generation of university leaders, and constructing technologically infused learning spaces. It is vital to create and promote integrity and fairness in these digital contexts. Regulations and new norms must be established for online teaching, student assessment, curriculum management, and intellectual property. Guidance and subsidy for infrastructure and technology must be provided to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

As often seems the way, higher education has been shaken by forces beyond its control. This is not unexpected given the central, though usually quiet, role universities have grown to play in broader socioeconomic life. As experiences in 2020 have demonstrated, universities can and must direct their futures, for the good of the globe. Universities are for life, not just for money, competitions, papers, and grades. Now is the time for bold education experiments, informed by major useful higher education design.

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Quality enhancement fo transnational education: beyond the pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Purpose

This paper sets out the new approach to review of UK Transnational Higher Education by the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education (UK). Readers will be able to understand the reasoning behind the focus on Evaluation and Quality Enhancement and how QAA will ensure that key stakeholders will be able to engage in the review of UK TNE as part of the design of the model.

Design/methodology/approach

The paper presents a single case, outlining the context for the approach followed and the development of the final model for TNE review.

Findings

The new model for UK higher education TNE review was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has an enhancement-led focus because it complements robust quality assurance processes that are in place across the UK. The collaborative approach to the development of the new model and to its implementation will ensure that the reputation of UK TNE is strengthened, it will build mutual trust, it will provide valued information and insights and will deliver benefits for TNE stakeholders.

Originality/value

The new model for UK higher education TNE review is built on a history of developmental and expansive approaches to review methodologies. As a consequence of the existing approaches to quality assurance, such as exist across the UK, QAA's approach can focus on quality evaluation and enhancement which other stakeholders can consider for their own contexts.

Keywords: *Transnational Education, Quality Enhancement, Collaboration, Partnerships.*

Introduction

The Quality Assurance Agency for UK Higher Education (QAA), founded in 1997, has over 20 years' experience of reviewing transnational education (TNE), having completed over 45 country reviews of the UK's TNE alongside its UK-based regulatory activity. TNE was impacted significantly by the pandemic with different countries being affected at different times and with variations in the responses from the different governments and regulatory bodies, including quality agencies. The disruptions raised new questions and approaches to assuring the quality of TNE and how universities were seeking to enhance their provision above any baseline regulatory requirement.

At the same time that the pandemic was sweeping across the globe and higher education providers were responding to a rapidly changing and evolving situation, the QAA was developing a new approach to quality review for UK transnational higher education.

What had become norms for TNE, overnight changed beyond imagination and the evolving model had to adapt to be able to meet the TNE landscape that has yet to emerge beyond the pandemic. The adage of 'time and tide wait for no man' applied to the development of a new approach to TNE review – QAA was not able to wait for the new global landscape post pandemic to exist, before it designed and delivered a new model.

QAA was not scheduled to undertake TNE reviews during the height of the pandemic in 2019/20; it was developing a new method for the evaluation and enhancement of TNE. Although due to be implemented from 2020/21, the need to respond to the immediate impact of the pandemic delayed design of, and consultation on, the new method for TNE review. Actions taken to respond to new approaches to quality assurance and enhancement in higher education in both UK-based and in UK TNE provision have helped to inform the new approach to QAA's review of UK TNE.

This paper shows how QAA has developed the UK's new model for Quality Enhancement of UK TNE (QE-TNE) so that it has sufficient flexibility to be able to adapt to meet the challenges created by the pandemic and to continue to assess the quality enhancement of transnational education in an age of uncertainty: beyond the pandemic. The paper sets out the key stages of the development of the new model, the consultative and collaborative approach that has been used and provides an overview of the model that will be delivered from 2021-22 to 2025-26. Points at which the UK higher education sector and international agencies and partners were involved are given.

Readers of the paper are encouraged to reflect on their own approach to quality assurance and consider how they can learn from the QAA's experience and approaches to enhance their own practice. Suggestions for reflective questions include:

- How do you systematise enhancement in your organisation?
- What strategies do you have to learn from your partners?
- How do you facilitate self-evaluation in your organisation?
- How do you measure the success of your self-evaluation?
- What positive outcomes have you drawn from any changes to your approach to quality assurance prompted by COVID?

The importance of TNE

Transnational education (TNE) is defined by QAA as: "the delivery of higher education level awards by recognised UK degree-awarding bodies in a country, or to students, other than where the awarding provider is based." (QAA, 2021a, p7). TNE enables students to study for an award from a UK higher education provider at a location other than the UK that can be closer to where the student is based.

In the UK, TNE is seen as a significant part of internationalisation, development and globalisation in a connected world. A report from the UK's Department for Education (Department for Education, 2020) found that education exports and TNE increased by 8.9% from 2017 to approximately £23.3 billion in 2018. Since 2010 there has been a growth of 92.3% in TNE activity with Higher Education accounting for 69% of the total revenue of education related exports and TNE activity.

Data from 2019-20 show that 156 UK providers recorded students on TNE programmes; in total 453,390 students were studying for UK awards through TNE provision. Host countries and their students benefit from TNE in a variety of ways for instance, TNE can enable inter-regional mobility and it makes a contribution to the host community economy. In addition, TNE students can gain an international education whilst studying

part-time and remaining in employment and income can be generated by attracting international students from neighbouring countries.

Thus, TNE is important to the UK and to the host countries, it has a value accorded to it for supporting government development agendas, cross-cultural understanding and collaboration as well as for bringing economic value to both host and sending countries.

QAA, the pandemic and "business as usual"

Along with most business organisations around the world, QAA offices were closed in response to World Health Organisation advice as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic spread during early 2020. Of key concern to QAA, to its partners, member organisations and the higher education sector internationally was seeking to ensure that quality and standards were maintained and that the impact on the student experience would be minimised. QAA sought to work collaboratively in the UK and internationally to share best practices, lessons learned, and solutions developed. In partnership with the UK higher education sector QAA produced over 30 briefings and resources along with webinars and advice; over 2000 delegates from 276 organisations attended webinars. Its International Partners' Forum brought together 50 attendees from more than 20 countries and led to publication of International Examples of Practice which fed into QAA's work in the UK.

Thus throughout the pandemic, QAA has worked proactively and collaboratively, at home and internationally, with institutions, partners, governments, quality bodies, students, employer-representative bodies, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies and others to help maintain and enhance the student experience. QAA has reviewed and revised its own approaches to respond to the new challenges it had to face, and will continue to face beyond the pandemic. QAA has been running a comprehensive schedule of international quality reviews, consultancy and training online throughout 2020/21 and has introduced appropriate checks and balances to meet the travel restrictions imposed.

QAA has also continued to design, develop and consult on a new model for TNE review that has reflected on previous models, the higher education landscape across the UK and internationally, creating a model that will meet the needs of UK higher education in TNE, the international contexts in which TNE is delivered and which is flexible to meet the world that will evolve beyond the pandemic.

Developing a new model for review of UK higher education tne

QAA has worked collaboratively with the UK higher education sector including higher education institutions, funders and regulators, representative bodies, mission groups and others to ensure that all voices had opportunities to contribute to the development of the new model. In addition, QAA engaged with international agencies, regulators and networks to share the evolving model to ensure that the potential countries that could be the locus for TNE review were able to have say in its ongoing development.

An in-depth analysis of the process and the reasoning behind it is beyond the scope of this paper but, in summary, there were four key stages:

1. A TNE working group and consultation
2. Commission to QAA to develop a new model
3. Consultation on the draft model
4. Finalisation and implementation

The consultations (QAA, 2019 and 2020) included a series of workshops for UK higher education institutions, representative bodies and other stakeholders and, at least one in each consultation, for international stakeholders. Both consultations included online questionnaire surveys to garner as wide and as broad a range of feedback as possible. All key stakeholder groups from UK and international were represented at the

workshops and in the completed surveys. Feedback from the first consultation informed the development of the proposed model which was then the subject of the second consultation. Feedback on the second consultation showed overwhelming support for the draft proposals which were developed into the finalised model which was launched in March 2021 (QAA, 2021a).

Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK higher education TNE

The UK higher education sector is complex, education is a devolved matter and operates differently in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, in accordance with the statutory, regulatory and legislative arrangements in each nation.

QAA is the UK's higher education quality body. It is an independent, not for profit agency and the only body recognised to assess the standards and quality of UK Universities. QAA has statutory status as 'Designated Quality Body' (QAA, 2018) in England and is recognised by governments in all four nations of the UK. The UK Quality Code applies across the UK with QAA being the only body that is officially recognised to undertake independent assessments and evaluations which in turn are used by the national funders and regulators to inform their decision making. QAA has nearly 270 member institutions across the UK (QAA, 2021b) with over 95% opting for voluntary memberships.

Within the UK, higher education institutions are autonomous organisations; they are recognised by, but not owned by, government. Each provider is responsible for assuring the quality and standards of any award that it makes; this applies whether a student studies on a campus in the UK, through distance or online learning, in a branch campus in an overseas location or through a local provider in another country.

The method through which quality is assured varies across each UK nation; the methods are beyond the scope of this paper, but each is developed and delivered to ensure a robust approach that also provides assurance on the quality of UK TNE provision.

The differentiation across the UK nations and the different regulatory responsibilities, alongside the need to be flexible in representing the whole of UK higher education, has prompted a recalibration of how QAA should approach the evaluation of UK TNE. This recalibration has been informed by what QAA has learned from its UK partners and member organisations and, from what it has learned from its international partners. In England, QAA member organisations have reported that they are looking for support to improve their higher education offer beyond the baseline requirements that are regulated by the Office for Students. Higher education quality assurance in Scotland is focussed on Enhancement, with a well-established methodology that looks at how an institution secures academic standards and how it improves the student experience. Recent review methodologies in Wales have also included a significant element of quality enhancement as well as the traditional quality assurance.

QAA's revised methodology for TNE review draws from these experiences and offers a process that measures and promotes enhancement above baseline regulatory standards. In doing so it fosters the exploration of different ways in which examples of good practices and challenges in partnerships can best be shared between institutions. Such an approach enables the building of mutual trust, and informs the dissemination of information and insights derived from these active partnerships, delivering benefit for all TNE stakeholders, thus strengthening the UK-TNE method. These core components of the new model are illustrated in Figure 1:

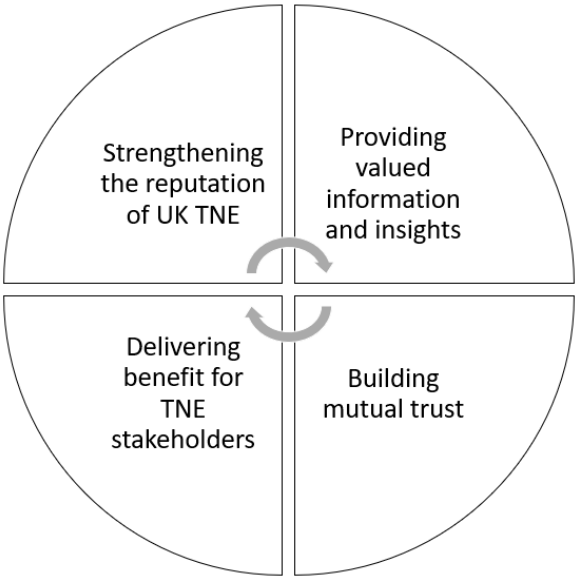

Figure 1. Core components of QAA's model for evaluation and enhancement of UK higher education TNE

Self evaluation in enhancement and knowledge transfer for mutual benefit

In revising the TNE approach to become a more developmental focused methodology rather than the summative review methodology epitomised in previous incarnations of TNE, QAA has also drawn on its experience of working with an increasingly broad range of international partners. These international partners engage QAA in a variety of events built around training and capacity building. Increasingly this engagement has focussed on the reciprocal transfer of knowledge resulting in mutual benefit, particularly as global partners and the UK sector contend with the same COVID-19 orientated issues. This has challenged any didactic tendencies in delivery and encouraged a more dialectic or Socratic approach to training. This has opened a more focussed discussion around the mutual benefits that our bespoke capacity building activities offer to both our overseas partners and their UK colleagues. This shift in focus from transmitting, to both transmitting and receiving has impacted on how we have revised our approach to TNE to become the *Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK Transnational Higher Education Provision* (QE-TNE).

As was stated earlier, QE-TNE is UK-wide and is constructed around collective benefit, shared practice and learning. It has as one of its main goals to maintain and strengthen the UK's position as a leading provider of high-quality transnational higher education. This position can only be maintained if transnational higher education moves along with the developing narrative of international knowledge transfer for the enhancement of higher education for students in both home and partner countries. QAA's approach to enhancement identifies shared challenges, areas for development and effective solutions, through seeking to highlight innovative and effective practice in all TNE providers. This approach – a commitment to mutual benefit and enhancement by the UK to further improve (or enhance) its TNE provision - strengthens the reputation and standing of UK higher education, demonstrating the value the UK places on the quality of the student learning experience.

This change in focus and the advent of QE-TNE to promote a two-way learning approach to improve learning in both the UK and internationally is the cornerstone of the quality enhancement focus of QE-TNE. The QE-TNE handbook states: '*The basic premise in quality enhancement is that wherever you are, you can always improve. Excellence is never a thing achieved or 'job done' but a continuous, purposeful striving*' (QAA, 2021, p.8). QE-TNE capitalises on this premise in its abiding mission, to encourage both UK institutions and their overseas partners to reflect on how they can respectfully improve and share improvement strategies. This approach in quality enhancement '*is to ask institutions: how they apply the information and insights from quality assurance processes, and other robust sources of data, to identify, prioritise and plan strategic improvement; how they are working*

strategically to enhance the quality of their TNE students' learning experiences; and how they are engaging and working with their TNE partners and their students to improve learning' (QAA, 2021, p.8)..

These fundamental questions are part of a cycle of self-evaluation that institutions are well used to, in which they ask themselves seven sequential, and cyclical, questions:

1. What are we doing?
2. How are we doing it?
3. Why are we doing it that way?
4. How well are we doing it?
5. How do we know how well we are doing it?
6. How can we improve it?

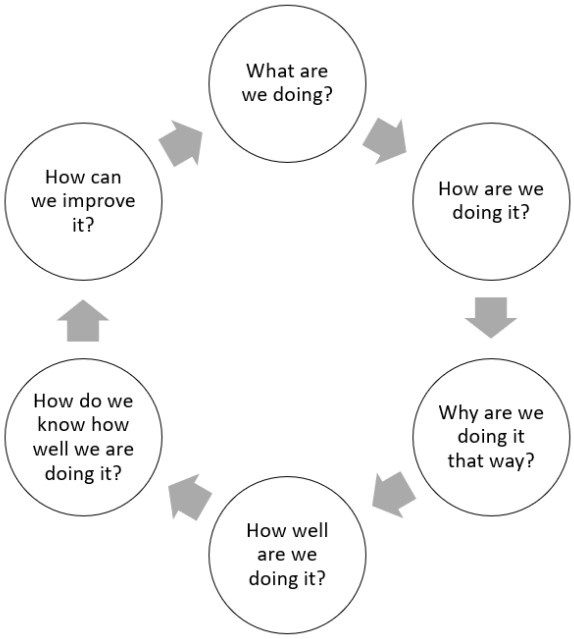

Figure 2. Cycle of self-evaluation

The QE-TNE approach to self-evaluation is couched in these self-evaluative questions that allow a picture to be built of both current performance and potential future enhancement. The resultant undertaking to enhance forms a crucial part of the knowledge that is shared between institutions for their mutual benefit and the improvement of learning opportunities for students both in the UK and UK TNE. The collaborative approach to QE-TNE delivery should also ensure benefits to international partners and higher education provision internationally. The sharing of resources developed from the QE-TNE method with those who are engaged in the review process, whether UK provider, international quality agency or local partner or branch campus.

QE-TNE stages of delivery

QE-TNE is delivered in five distinct stages (Figure 3).

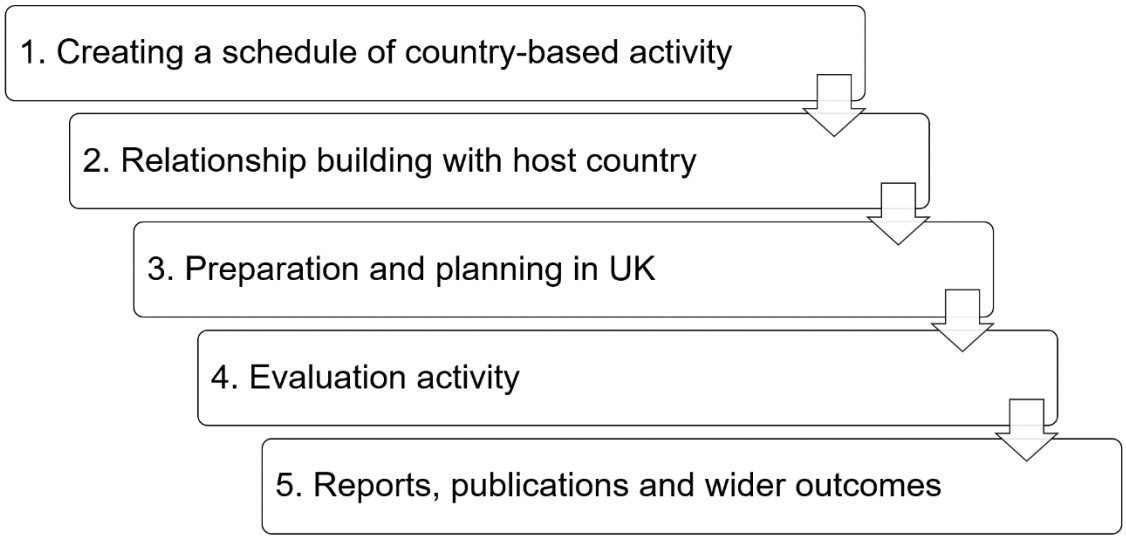

Figure 3. The five-step process for QE-TNE

Stage 1. Creating a schedule of country-based activity

Normally, at least eighteen month prior to the review year, QAA, working with the two bodies who commissioned QAA to develop the new model, on behalf of the UK higher education sector, Universities UK (UUK) and the Guild for Higher Education (GuildHE), draw on data and information to identify proposed countries that best meet the selection criteria. (For the first year of review (2021/22) this will be eight months prior to the review year.)

In each review year, three countries will be identified for review. The data is used to establish:

1. A top-10 host country by student numbers, based on the most recent available data. In order to ensure a representative spread of providers and models for delivery of TNE, the top-three providers, who are primarily involved in online/distance learning are not included in this top-10. It should be noted that online/distance learning and these three are included in the reviews, once the countries have been determined.
2. The length of time since a previous review (to aim to ensure that those not yet, or not recently reviewed, will be included in the five-year programme)
3. Criteria related to market intelligence, country requests, UK priority areas, historical and geographical contexts.

QE-TNE approach is flexible to allow a topic to replace a country in one, or more, of the review period. Topics could include graduate employability, TNE through distance-learning, enabling student engagement.

Stage 2. Relationship building with the host country

Since 1997, QAA developed formal and informal relationships with quality networks and with quality assurance agencies across the globe. Underpinning the development of these relationships has been the need to strengthen understanding of the UK's approaches to quality assurance and to TNE provision. In addition, they allow access to information and intelligence on local operating environments for UK TNE and can help to inform QAA's selection of countries for each review period.

Once the forward schedule for QE-TNE review is published, QAA contacts the agencies and key government departments (both UK and local) in the countries to confirm that a review is planned. Where formal relationships do not yet exist, QAA starts the process of building a relationship with a view to ensuring full engagement of and with the local agencies etc by the time of the review. Through this engagement QAA aims

to provide an opportunity for discussions with the local representative bodies in advance of the QE-TNE work in that country.

A key element of QAA's work during this stage is to ensure that these representative bodies have a sound understanding of the UK approaches to quality assurance, the role of the QAA and the QE-TNE model. QAA will also seek to establish approaches to quality assurance and approval of provision of TNE in the country to be reviewed. This engagement is intended to help to build confidence in the UK's quality assurance systems, understanding of local requirements and the aim that such mutual understanding will, for example, lead to a reduction in any duplication of processes.

Stage 3. Preparation and planning in the UK

Early in each review year, QAA conducts an initial survey of publicly-available data, to identify which UK degree awarding bodies are involved in TNE in the countries to be reviewed. Those with provision in the relevant countries are contacted to provide both qualitative and quantitative data for the initial overview report which sets out the scale and type of TNE in each country.

From the data, QAA identifies a representative sample of the TNE provision to be included in the review. This sample will include the selection of the arrangements for evaluation and for case studies and will help identify if there are any particular matters that should be explored as part of the overall QE-TNE engagement.

A review team is constituted for each country comprising three expert peer reviewers; all teams include one student reviewer. Each team is led by a QAA Officer who is a quality specialist with substantial TNE experience. The QAA Officer schedules all the visits, whether in the UK or in the review country, attends all meetings and maintains all relevant records.

Stage 4. Evaluation activity

The review teams undertake a range of desk-based analysis, visits to UK TNE providers within the UK and to the TNE provision in the countries that are the focus of the review.

When visiting the review countries, activities will include meeting local representative bodies such as the regulators and quality agencies as well as holding open meetings with UK TNE students and, where possible, UK TNE alumni, and employers.

Whilst restrictions on travel continue, due to COVID-19, and where there are other reasons for not including an in-person visit, the QE-TNE model allows for virtual engagement through online meetings to enable the review activity to continue and be completed.

Stage 5. Reports, publications and wider outcomes

The outcomes of QE-TNE include published reports, a range of resources and strengthened relationships and international understanding. Access to the outputs will vary depending on how organisations engage with the QE-TNE scheme and QAA membership. Where UK higher education institutions are members of the scheme, their TNE partners, local branch campuses etc can also access the same resources. A summary of the outputs is given in Figure 4.

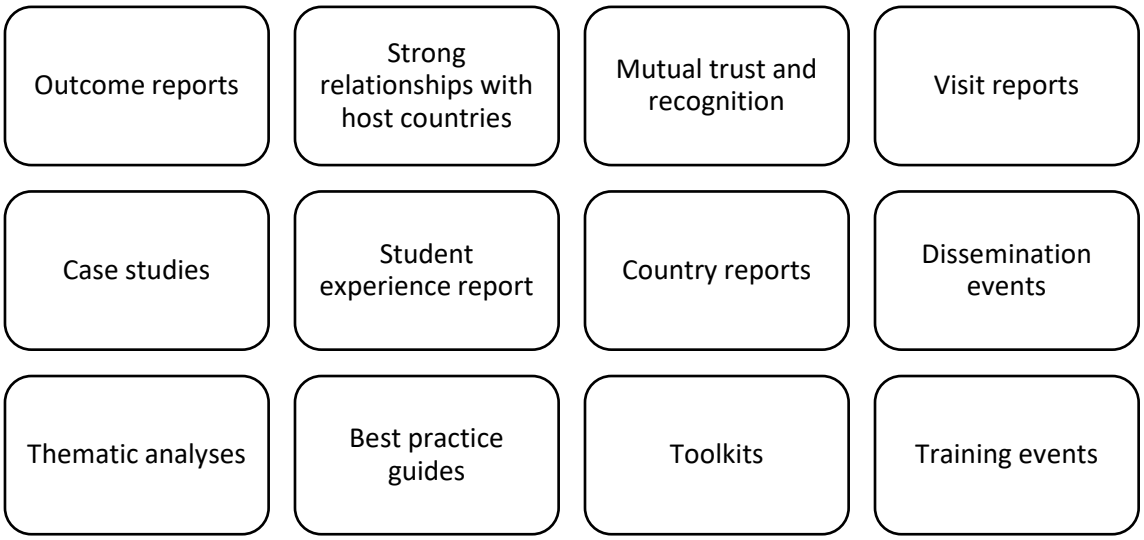

Figure 4. Summary of intended outputs from QE-TNE review activity

Conclusions

This paper has set out the context in which a new model for evaluation of transnational education was developed. It has shown the importance of TNE to both the sending and receiving countries, students and the economies. The reasoning behind a quality-enhancement focus has been explained and the five-stages of the new methodology have been outlined. The paper has looked, briefly, at the process for the design of the new method, showing the progressive approach to its development and how all key stakeholder groups were able to be involved.

What has been learned through past experiences and the input of the key stakeholders is reflected in the new model for QAA's review of UK higher education TNE: Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK Transnational Higher Education Provision (QE-TNE). QAA's focus now is on ensuring that the new method generates a richer range of outputs, with closer working, relationship building and mutual benefits for all countries involved. There will be a greater emphasis on the student experience and outcomes, as well as on quality enhancement. QE-TNE will complement the UK approaches to quality assurance that are in place through different models in the four UK nations.

This focus on close working, relationship building and mutual benefits is particularly relevant in the new, post-COVID, context. QAA, along with many others, have seen how important international partnerships have been during the pandemic, and can see how they will continue to be essential moving forward.

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Development of a methodology to assess innovative methodologies in teaching and learning in the Basque University System

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ABSTRACT

In the framework of the INNOMETH project, funded by INQAAHE, Unibasq has developed a methodology for the assessment of innovative/active methodologies in teaching and learning in the Basque University System. The new regulation regarding study programmes in the Basque Country establishes that study programmes should be classified in different levels under the category of "Innovative methodologies in teaching and learning". Likewise, innovation in teaching and learning is a hot topic highlighted in the last European Higher Education Area Ministerial conferences, linking innovation in teaching and learning with the implementation of student-centred learning and the development of soft skills like innovative and critical thinking, emotional intelligence, leadership, teamwork and problem solving abilities. The different phases of the project (desk-based review, focus-groups with academic staff and students, and workshop) have provided information on the use of active learning methodologies helping to develop the assessment methodology.

Key words: *innovation, active teaching and learning, student-centred learning.*

Introduction

Interest in active teaching and learning and student-centred learning (SCL) has been long-standing among educators in higher education and as a result, research, policy and practice claiming to take a SCL has continued to grow (Lea et al., 2003). As many similar others concepts heterogeneously disseminated worldwide –such as innovative methodologies and active teaching or learning–, SLC offers an umbrella term with many variations that have at times led to confusion (Trinidad, 2020). Many different actors may contribute towards a substantive shift were SCL should be a real key issue both in policy and practice and the Quality Assurance Agencies must be at this stake in this critical issue.

Unibasq –the Agency for Quality of the Basque University System– is actively committed to this issue and has developed a specific assessment methodology related to its activity of program-assessment. More specifically, the agency has developed a framework –namely, the "Assessment of innovative methodologies in teaching and learning in the Basque University System (INNOMETH) – as a result of a Project coordinated by Unibasq and funded by INQAAHE within the initiative "Capacity Building Projects 2019".

Innovation in teaching and learning is a hot topic in the global higher education landscape as has been highlighted in the last European Higher Education Area Ministerial conferences (Paris Communiquè (2018) and Rome Communiquè (2020)). Linking innovation in teaching and learning with the implementation SCL "*in order to respond to growing needs for innovative and critical thinking, emotional intelligence, leadership, teamwork and problem solving*

abilities, as well as enterprising attitudes" and "*with due consideration for the skills needed to address current and future challenges of society*".

According to the European Students' Union (ESU & EI, 2010) "*Student Centred Learning represents both a mind-set and a culture within a given higher education institution and is a learning approach which is broadly related to, and supported by, constructivist theories of learning. It is characterised by innovative methods of teaching which aim to promote learning in communication with teachers and other learners and which take students seriously as active participants in their own learning, fostering transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and*

reflective thinking." Furthermore, SCL is in the core of part 1 of the revised version of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015).

The regulation regarding study programmes in the Basque Country (Decree 274/2017 of 19 December (BOPV, 2017) and Order of the Basque Minister of Education of 27 July 2018 (BOPV, 2018)) establishes that study programmes should be classified in different levels under three categories, including one regarding "Innovative methodologies in teaching and learning". The Order provides some aspects and indicators to consider as methodologies such as project-based and problem-based learning; academic staff with a positive evaluation of their teaching performance; student satisfaction; and a strategy to manage the implementation and monitoring of active learning methodologies.

Methodology

The project specific objectives and main actions can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Specific objectives and actions of the INNOMETH project

Objectives	Actions
Setting the general context of the use of innovative methodologies in teaching and learning – Identification of these innovative methodologies	Creation of the steering group Desk-based research
Analysis of the use of innovative methodologies within the Basque HEIs	Focus-groups with representatives of the three Basque universities (academic staff and students/alumni)
Guidelines drafting	Elaboration of the draft methodology (guidelines: procedure, standards and criteria)
Capacity building - good practices sharing	Workshop with the lessons learnt from the previous activities and good practice sharing. Keynote speakers to introduce the topic presenting success cases of the use of these innovative methodologies
Final version of the guidelines	Elaboration of the specific methodology (guidelines: procedure, standards and criteria) considering the lessons learnt through the project

The assessment methodology is based on the outcomes of the project:

- Information collected on the use of active learning methodologies and student-centred learning, including the educational model and the teaching innovation initiatives developed in recent years by the three Basque universities.
- Focus groups held with teachers and students, gathering their perspectives including what they understand as innovative methodologies, the benefit of their use, challenges and good practices.
- Workshop to share the preliminary results and to reflect on them (January 2020).

Outcomes

The discussions held with representatives of the three universities regarding the concept of innovative teaching and learning methodologies and its relationship with teaching innovation, led us to the conclusion that, although there were common points, each university interpreted this concept within its own educational model. The Danish Accreditation Institution (AI) found a similar situation when analysing how Danish institutions understand and apply the concept of student-centred approach. They concluded that there are diverse interpretations, that the external evaluation must consider and see how it is included in their quality system (Warming & Frydensberg, 2018). A similar situation, although in the general framework of institutional

evaluation, can be found in NVAO's 'Appreciative Approach' in its evaluations in Flanders. The "Overview report on the institutional reviews. The quality of the educational policies at the Flemish universities and university colleges" (Caris & Aerden, 2017), summarises the results of the pilots carried out between 2015-2017, concluding "*In this approach, the context of the institution and the educational policy model chosen by the institution were the starting point. It was therefore not judged whether the chosen policy model was "good", but whether it worked.*"

Throughout the different phases of the project it has become evident that:

- The three Basque universities have their own educational models, implemented to a greater or lesser extent depending on the centres and the study programmes they teach.
- Evaluation of the development of active teaching and learning methodologies should address the specificities of each model.
- The quality assurance system of each institution should be the starting point for the assessment of active teaching and learning methodologies.

Procedure

It should be, as concluded in the previous section, a holistic external evaluation approach in the overall context of the study programme within a centre and university, encompassing wider educational developments including the design and implementation of study programmes and considering the expected learning outcomes. As this is not an isolated process, it should be integrated within other usual evaluation procedures.

In any case, the external assessment process must be aligned with the ESG 2.3 and consist of the following phases:

- Self-assessment;
- An external assessment including, where appropriate, a visit;
- A report resulting from the external assessment;
- Systematic monitoring.

Constitution on the assessment panel

Given the nature of active learning methodologies, it is crucial to incorporate specific expertise in the area - teaching innovation, active learning, SCL, project-based or problem-based learning, among others - within the assessment panels. Following ESG 2.4, a transparent and adequate selection process of experts should be ensured by ensuring that all panels include at least one person with proven experience in teaching innovation/active learning, among others, in addition to complying with the usual composition of the panels, which would include at least one student preferably with experience in this type of methodologies. Similarly, specific training will be ensured for the evaluation panels in relation to the specificities of this type of methodology and information on the educational model of each university.

The general composition of each panel will be established in the guide to the evaluation procedure (renewal of institutional or degree accreditation) in which this evaluation is integrated.

Stakeholders involved

It should be borne in mind that the assessment of this type of methodology requires the involvement of many stakeholders (institutional heads, school and study programme heads, academic and support staff, students, graduates and representatives of collaborating entities, among others) during the different phases of the

process (self-assessment, visit, etc.). It should include units of educational innovation/advice, quality units, those responsible for managing the educational model and even vice-rectors involved.

Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria follow the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015) as can be seen in the following table:

Table 2. Assessment criteria and their correspondence with ESG Part 1 (2015).

Assessment of active teaching and learning methodologies	ESG 2015
Educational model	1.1 Policy for Quality Assurance 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes
Development of the teaching-learning processes	1.2 Design and approval of programmes 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment
Students	1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification
Teaching staff	1.5 Teaching staff
Resources	1.6 Learning resources and student support
Outcomes - Information Management	1.7 Information management
Public information	1.8 Public information

Criterion 1. Educational model

Standard: The institution applies the University's educational model in a systematic way in the official study programmes it offers.

Guidelines:

- The institution has a governance structure that allows it to coordinate the implementation of the educational model.
- The institution has a strategy that includes a clear description of responsibilities, roles and procedures for the implementation of the educational model.
- The institution has set goals in relation to the impact of the educational model on the teaching and learning processes, on the labour insertion of graduates, on society and on other areas of interest. These goals are consistent with the strategic objectives of the University.
- The deployment of the educational model in the institution is done through active learning methodologies, with the necessary flexibility to meet the characteristics of each study programme, the diversity of students and their lifelong learning. The model allows students to complete their studies part-time and to choose the components of their own curriculum.
- The institution promotes the development of teaching innovation plans or projects aimed at introducing, reviewing or improving teaching and learning.
- The institution has a contingency plan to ensure the application of active learning methodologies in situations that may arise.
- The institution monitors, reviews and reports to the University on the application of the educational model and active learning methodologies for their improvement.

• The institution recognizes good teaching practices focused on the development of active learning methodologies and the educational model.

Criterion 2. Development of the teaching and learning processes

Standard: The development of the teaching and learning processes, in all the study programmes taught in the institution, is consistent with the educational model and the application of active learning methodologies.

Guidelines:

- The coordination strategies and procedures developed in the subjects and courses favour the application of the educational model in all the study programmes taught in the institution.
- Teaching activities are supported by active learning methodologies that are aligned with the foundations and principles of the educational model. These activities take into consideration the diversity of the students and are in line with their training needs.
- The students' learning strategies are inscribed in the active learning methodologies developed in the subjects and courses.
- The participation of collaborating entities in the teaching processes is carried out in accordance with the bases and principles of the educational model and with a concept of lifelong learning.
- The institution uses an assessment for learning approach. The application of this approach provides information that enables the teaching staff to help students improve their learning. Assessment procedures are varied and consider the diversity of the student body and their learning needs.
- The evaluation of the teaching activity of teachers is aligned with the educational model.

Criterion 3. Students

Standard: Students know and internalize the implications of the educational model, act according to its foundations and principles and have the necessary guidance and support in the personal, academic and administrative areas.

Guidelines:

- The institution has provided the necessary information and training so that the students really know the implications that the educational model has for them in the personal, academic and administrative areas.
- Students or their representatives participate in the bodies that make decisions on the implementation, revision and improvement of the educational model.
- Students have the knowledge and competence necessary to carry out the activities and tasks derived from the application of active learning methodologies developed in the institution.
- The activities carried out by the students in the academic, professional or social fields in the institution are in accordance with the foundations and principles of the educational model and are part of the active learning methodologies developed.
- The guidance, tutoring and learning facilitation activities promoted by the institution help to improve students' learning outcomes and their lifelong learning.
- The educational support offered to students takes into consideration their diversity and the different needs that arise from it.

- The institution has the tools and procedures that allow it to address the actions of students that are contrary to the foundations and principles of the educational model or the use of active learning methodologies.

Criterion 4. Teaching staff

Standard: The teaching staff has internalized the educational model and its implications and acts daily according to its foundations and principles, having the necessary training and support in the personal, academic and administrative fields.

Guidelines:

- The institution has provided the necessary information and training so that teachers are aware of the implications that the educational model has on the personal, academic and administrative spheres.
- Teachers or their representatives participate in the bodies that make decisions on the implementation, review and improvement of the educational model.
- The teaching staff is competent in the use of active learning methodologies promoted by the institution.
- Teachers have internalized the educational model so that the teaching activities they carry out daily are supported using active learning methodologies that are in line with the foundations and principles of the educational model indicated.
- The teaching innovations introduced by the teachers support the use of active methodologies that have the educational model and student-centred learning as their reference, so that they deepen the foundations of this model, subject it to revision or improve it.
- The teaching staff carries out and publishes research on their teaching. The results of such research are transferred to the improvement of teaching and learning processes.
- The professional development of teachers is consistent with the results of the evaluation of their teaching activity.
- The training offered to teachers takes into consideration their training needs related to the development of active learning methodologies and their career development.
- The institution has the tools and procedures that allow it to address the actions of teachers that are contrary to the foundations and principles of the educational model or the use of active learning methodologies.

Criterion 5. Resources

Standard: The institution has adequate infrastructure and resources for training based on active learning methodologies within the framework of its educational model.

Guidelines:

- The institution provides the academic staff, the administration and support staff and the students with the necessary resources and technical support for the adequate implementation of active learning methodologies within the framework of the educational model.
- The resources and didactic means used in the subjects and courses favour the application of the educational model and the development of active learning methodologies.

- The technological support received by students helps them to develop learning strategies consistent with the proposed active learning methodologies.
- The personal support and services provided to students to encourage the development of learning strategies consistent with the proposed active learning methodologies.
- The institution regularly reviews and updates the resources available to faculty and students for the application of active learning methodologies.
- The institution provides financial, material, human or other resources to facilitate the development of teaching innovations or research on teaching.
- The institution promotes the acquisition and use of innovative resources - even in the period of trial or experimentation - to facilitate the introduction of new ways of teaching and learning.

Criterion 6. Outcomes - Information management

Standard: The institution has a system to collect, manage and analyse information in an agile, systematic and relevant way about the application of active learning methodologies and achieved learning outcomes, within the framework of its educational model.

Guidelines:

- The institution periodically collects information on the application of active learning methodologies from the opinions of teachers, students, graduates, collaborating entities and other interest groups, and from performance and satisfaction indicators.
- The institution analyses the information collected to improve and increase the application of active learning methodologies, in aspects such as student involvement in tasks, assessment for learning, student and academic staff knowledge of these methodologies or learning outcomes.
- The institution carries out a systematic review of the achieved learning outcomes to establish their consistency with the educational model and active learning methodologies used.
- The institution uses the most relevant outcomes extracted from the analyses to promote improvements in students' learning experiences.
- The institution uses the most relevant outcomes extracted from the analyses to promote improvements in the application of active learning methodologies in classrooms, seminars, workshops, etc.

Criterion 7. Public information

Standard: The institution reports in a segmented, truthful, complete and updated way to the main stakeholders (students, teachers, management and collaborating entities) about the active learning methods and the educational model of reference, according to their different profiles.

Guidelines:

- The institution informs the students before they enrol in a study programme about the educational model of reference, the active learning methodologies that are planned to be applied, and the evaluation procedures to be used (criteria, regulations and instruments), the didactic resources and the technical support available.
- The institution informs the teaching staff before the start of the academic year about the outcomes obtained with the application of active learning methodologies, the learning outcomes of the

students and, if applicable, the changes introduced in their application, as well as their implications in the educational model.

- The institution informs the management before the beginning of the academic year about the outcomes of the application of active learning methodologies, the learning outcomes of the students, the impact generated by these methodologies, as well as the decisions taken in the different areas of responsibility.
- The institution informs the collaborating entities and other stakeholders about the evolution of the application of active learning methodologies, the main changes made and the learning outcomes obtained.
- The information provided to the management is used, according to the different levels of decision, to review the planning of teaching, to evaluate the teaching activity of the teaching staff or to design training activities.
- The institution regularly and systematically publishes information on good practice focusing on the development of active learning methodologies.

Conclusions

Assessment criteria, standards and guidelines have been developed to help institutions organize how they will describe the context in which active learning methodologies have been implemented and their impact.

The assessment criteria should not be understood as a closed set of criteria that could limit the institution in providing information on the impact of active learning methodologies. It is the institution that presents the context in which the active learning methodologies are developed and that chooses how to demonstrate the impact that these methodologies have on student learning, on the professional development of the teaching staff, as well as on the relations with the collaborating entities and their impact on society.

The institutions may also provide such evidence, as they deem appropriate. The proposed assessment approach also focuses on the collection of evidence relating to the strengths of the institutions, stories of achievement of objectives and good practice, as well as the success stories of their students, graduates and faculty. In this sense, the institutions can incorporate personal testimonies and involve the collaborating entities to support the arguments made that try to demonstrate the fulfilment of goals and expectations.

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Building resilience in higher education: criteria for quality assurance amid disruptions and crises

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ABSTRACT

In response to the Covid-19 crisis, higher education institutions across the world adjusted their activities to an emergency, remote mode in the first half of 2020. As internal quality assurance is central to the assurance of the quality of institutions' provision, this sudden shift in the mode of delivery has raised questions around the effectiveness, relevance and flexibility of internal quality assurance arrangements.

Drawing on the experiences of European higher education institutions as its evidence-base, this contribution examines the key challenges institutions faced and the role internal quality assurance played in ensuring that the quality standards were maintained. Equally, it examines how quality assurance practices supported university communities in their work while assuring the public of the status of quality in higher education. It concludes with key lessons learnt and a reflection on what lies ahead for internal quality assurance.

An outline description

It is widely acknowledged that higher education institutions have primary responsibility for quality assurance (QA) and the enhancement of their learning and teaching activities. This principle is apparent in various overarching frameworks for quality assurance around the world (ESG, 2015, pp. 7-8; ASG-QA, 2018, p. 11; AQAF, 2016, p. 9; CHEA, 2015) and places internal QA at the core of quality attainment and the development of a sustainable quality culture.

The European University Association examined how European institutions have adjusted their internal quality assurance systems to respond to the changes brought about by the Covid-19 crisis. It organised a focus group which gathered 39 institutional representatives from 20 countries with responsibilities in internal quality assurance and conducted a review of selected materials produced by the quality assurance community on institutional responses to the Covid-19 measures. This contribution is based on an EUA report which presents the results of this work.

The focus group discussions echoed the main challenges identified in various reports on the impact of Covid-19. These relate primarily to the transition to online mode of delivery accompanied by the urgent need for capacity building; safeguarding inclusion and equity; student assessment; ensuring academic integrity and data protection; and international mobility (EUA, 2020; Salmi 2020; Marinoni & al., 2020; QAA UK, 2020; QQI, 2020). Higher education institutions needed to balance two fundamental values: health and safety on the one hand, and quality of education on the other.

The focus group confirmed that the institutional responses varied depending on size, governance model, discipline, and the status of online learning[1] provision prior to the crisis (EUA, 2020, p. 3). Practically all higher education institutions reacted by implementing the emergency remote education. However, as the pandemic persisted, some institutions' emergency remote education started to shift towards online learning. This shift emerged as a result of institutions gaining experience with online pedagogies and assessment methods, acquiring various digital tools and learning to use them more efficiently as well as investing in capacity-building for staff and students.

[1] This briefing uses the term online learning to cover terms such as e-learning, distance education, digital learning and digitally enhanced learning.

Theme 2. New Quality Agendas for External and Internal Quality Assurance

The focus group participants agreed that during 2020, established internal quality assurance practices remained fundamentally unchanged but, in many cases, their scope and focus had been expanded. In the first phase of the pandemic, the focus was on crisis management largely linked to the transition to online delivery of teaching and university services. Institutions revised existing internal policies and introduced new ones to ensure equity in and access to education, increase clarity and transparency and to address the challenges presented by remote operations. At this stage, decisions on different matters were taken quickly. This did not allow for decision-making based on evidence gathered through the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, which forms the basis for many internal quality assurance systems.

During the second phase, the attention shifted to quality management and improvement. Thus, in the second half of 2020, the focus moved to checking and planning. This was triggered by a need for information on the experiences gained during the emergency phase to inform more effective planning for the following semester. Surveys and other monitoring methods as well as communication on the results of these were conducted online. Feedback was sought on the usual topics, but also on new ones related to online delivery of learning, support and training needs, communication channels and their effectiveness, Covid-19 regulations, technology, and staff and student wellbeing.

The first year of the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the paramount role played by institutional daily practices in ensuring the quality of education. Institutions have shown remarkable resilience and capacity for acting swiftly. An overwhelming majority of the focus group participants concluded that their respective institutions had succeeded in maintaining the quality of their activities in most areas during the crisis.

The key success factors in this regard include: institutional autonomy allowing institutions to make decisions and act promptly accompanied by adequate institutional strategy, leadership, and capacity to manage change; quality culture based on ownership of and commitment to quality shared by all members of an institutional community; collaboration and sharing of experiences across the institution and between institutions was found to be valuable in seeking solutions to the challenges faced. Lastly, efficient communication to and with staff and students as well as between staff and students was noted as particularly important in light of mandated physical distancing.

The pandemic has prompted a major boost for digitalisation of higher education institutions. It has revealed the potential, benefits as well as shortcomings of online learning. Discussions on the long-term perspectives need to take place now to better prepare for the future. In this context, three key messages for the internal quality assurance processes conclude the presentation: 1) Quality assurance should contribute to reflections on the future development of teaching and learning by providing evidence on the most efficient approaches to online education. 2) Further attention is needed on aspects related to online learning such as digitalisation policies, monitoring instruments, appropriateness of digital tools, online course development and structure, staff and student support, online assessment methods, data protection, privacy regulations and academic integrity (Huertas et al., 2018). 3) Since the typical internal quality assurance enhancement cycle proved to be slow in times of crisis, could the processes be reformed to allow for a prompter feedback-loop and more timely reactions? And could digitalisation of quality assurance itself play a role in this regard?

Only by addressing these issues can internal quality assurance stay relevant and demonstrate its value added in promoting the continued innovation of teaching and learning in higher education.

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Education for Sustainable Development Guidance

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ABSTRACT

In March 2021 QAA and Advance HE jointly published Education for Sustainable Development Guidance. This guidance is intended to be of practical help to higher education providers (HEPs) working with students and staff to foster their knowledge, understanding and skills in the area of sustainable development (SD). It provides a framework to support curriculum design and general guidance on approaches to teaching, learning and assessment.

This session outlines the key elements of the guidance and shares an example of how GCU has developed the strategic direction and capacity to deliver ESD and make a contribution to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015-30) (SDGs). The SDGs now provide a useful scaffolding for GCU's 2030 strategy, one key element of which is championing the inclusion of ESD across its curricula.

Why ESD is important for higher education now

There is an increased urgency for everybody in society to take positive actions in addressing SD issues. The challenge is stark and includes a wide range of interconnected environmental and social issues such as global climate change, local and global biodiversity loss, depletion of natural resources, deforestation, air quality, access to water, hunger, gender equality, and widening inequalities of wealth, health and wellbeing. These are just some examples of key issues that pose existential threats to humanity and require wider and urgent attention across curricula.

Higher education providers educate generations of graduates - how those individuals live, learn and work throughout their lifetimes has a long-lasting impact on the environmental and social challenges the world is facing. The skills, attributes and values that graduates develop during their studies can equip them to contribute to a more sustainable future and transform their thinking. In this respect, higher education has a crucial role in ensuring a sustainable future.

About the national guidance

Set against the backdrop of the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015-30) in 2015, the ESDG represents a major update from the 2014 guidance. It has been updated to reflect changes in understanding about, and priorities in, SD and the increased urgency for everybody in society to take positive actions in addressing SD issues. The guidance is primarily aimed at staff involved in curriculum design and course management and delivery, to support them in designing ESD across curricula. It is also likely to be of value to senior management teams, those with responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement and staff involved in directing teaching and learning. Such individuals have an important role in empowering staff to engage with the ideas presented in the national guidance.

ESD is education *for* sustainable development and not just *about* sustainable development. It can be understood as a lens that permits us to look critically at how the world is and to envision how it might be. ESD supports learners across all academic disciplines in developing the subject relevant competencies to create and pursue visions of a better world, one that recognises the interdependence of environmental integrity, social justice and economic prosperity. ESD is therefore focused on the process of creating curriculum structures and subject-relevant content to support and enact SD.

There is considerable evidence too that students expect SD to be incorporated into their institutional practices and curricula. In the 2020 National Union of Students (NUS) Skills Survey, 91% of respondents agreed their

place of study should actively incorporate SD - up from 88% in 2014; while 83% would like to see SD actively incorporated and promoted across all courses - up from 71% in 2014.

What the national guidance covers

The guidance is divided into four sections;

Section 1 offers an introduction to ESD before outlining a rationale for it taking prominence across curricula. The introduction of SDGs in 2015 is discussed and presented as the contemporary policy framing for SD when focusing on designing ESD across curricula.

Section 2 discusses how to get started with ESD. It recognises the importance of strategic, institution-level commitment and support when looking to progress ESD, and how ESD can frame and reinforce other institutional objectives. It highlights key players that can help inform the framing and design of ESD across curricula and offers guidance for their contribution and support.

Section 3 focuses on teaching, learning and assessment approaches for ESD. It introduces the key competencies for sustainability, course and module learning outcomes for ESD and guidance about developing learning environments to support ESD.

Section 4 offers an annotated reference and resources list. It includes a diverse range of additional resources from a variety of organisations with a focus on supporting the design and implementation of SD content across institutions and curricula.

The Glasgow Caledonian University experience

The SDGs provide the guiding framework for the University's forthcoming new Strategy 2030, which requires integration of the SDGs across the University and a system to monitor and enhance the process of doing this. In adopting a holistic approach the University has established four work streams:

- Communications, impact rankings and league tables
- **Integration of SDGs into the curriculum**
- Research, knowledge exchange and social innovation
- Student engagement and community outreach

The paper focuses on progress with the work stream relating to integrating SDGs into the curriculum and outlines the process and actions undertaken, challenges faced, lessons learned and impact so far. GCU's approach to ESD and the SDGs is characterised by its whole institutional scope which, due to timing, takes into account the University's new strategy, the development of a new learning and teaching strategy, and the publication of QAA/Advance HE's ESD guidance. This alignment has been an important factor in informing the updating of the University's quality processes and staff development around curriculum design. Specific planned actions for academic year 2021/22 include:

- A baseline study of current engagement of our staff and students in ESD e.g. curriculum, external networks, partnerships, research-teaching linkages, public engagement and co-curriculum activities.
- A baseline study of how SDGs are currently embedded in GCU curricula.
- Integration of SDGs into academic quality processes, specifically internal subject review.
- Development of potential curriculum design guidance for staff drawing on QAA/Advance HE's new ESD guidance.
- Design and delivery of a staff development programme to assist staff in integrating SDGs in their curricula.

From Imagination to Implementation: Five lessons from Latin America and the Caribbean

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 crisis has confronted the world in more immediate and tangible ways than other ongoing and equally important global challenges (i. e., climate change, income inequality, world peace, or sustainable development). In higher education, the current crisis has forced all institutions, ready or not, to pivot into online education and digital learning. Everything that seemed "certain," such as the ability to meet face to face, has triggered a ripple effect of "uncertainties" about teaching, learning, assessment, and quality assurance. Re-imagining potential solutions is a necessary endeavor. Yet, such practices might generate timely and systemic solutions only to the extent that they lead to lasting change. Strategy and implementation go hand in hand, and a deeper understanding of the issues at hand can inform how institutions adopt and adapt to digital learning. This paper examines the lessons that emerged from institutions in Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) regions. Hopefully, these lessons and reflections may contribute additional insights and precision to the journey ahead of us.

Introduction

Higher education plays an essential role in the growth of any society. It gathers some of the greatest minds and accomplished professionals, cultivates the minds of newer generations, generates new knowledge that fuels innovations, and contributes to communities and nations at large. However, as with any system, higher education requires growth, evolution, and sustainable contributions that are specifically related to ensuring the quality and the impact of its educational offerings. The reality is that the higher-education sector faced significant challenges even before the COVID-19 crisis (Dua, Law, Rounsaville & Viswanath, 2020).

The recent global pandemic has stopped educational institutions in their tracks, forcing them to abruptly switch to remote teaching and possibly threatening the quality or consistency of their offerings. However, despite this climate of perceived uncertainty, it may be the best moment for educational institutions to cultivate quality in a digital era.

In his book, Illusions, Richard Bach (1977) wrote the following:

"You are never given a wish without also being given the power to make it come true. You may have to work for it, however."

Words of wisdom like these should empower us to cut through the midst of uncertainty, and yes, we may have to work for it. Specifically, it will require a disposition willing to examine and question assumptions. It will invite stakeholders to see our challenges with beginner's eyes. Finally, it will inspire us to ensure that quality is not just a set of institutional indicators in a dashboard, but a culture that embeds quality at institutions' cellular structure, inside the course, where faculty and learners convene and where quality and innovation occur.

Framing our challenge

Before we explore some alternatives to migrate from uncertainty to certainty and from imagination to implementation, we need to frame our challenge by viewing it through the following lenses:

1. The themes of the conference
2. The dynamics between innovations and their adoption
3. The role of instructional design as a catalyst for change

Lens No.1 – The themes of the conference

Our conference's themes invite us to focus on "re-imagination," digital disruption, and challenges and opportunities for quality assurance. Imagination, argues Burton (2018), "enables us to form associations and connections, and thereby to apply our knowledge to real-life situations. It opens up alternatives and possibilities and guides our decision-making by playing them out in our minds. So many of our failures—and a few of our successes—are, in fact, failures of the imagination." He concludes by proposing that "imagination is the highest form of thought".

Hence, to "imagine" what does not yet exist, it is necessary to create the conditions needed for it to manifest, such as a disposition to observe, to wonder, and to make an effort to see our presumably "known world and practices" with fresh eyes and with a beginner's curiosity. "Wonder is the beginning of wisdom," said Socrates.

Lens No. 2 – The dynamics of innovations and their adoption

To reimagine is to innovate. Yet, innovation is only an ethereal idea or concept until it is materialized and adopted. Ultimately, it opens opportunities to address the problems for which it was conceived in the first place.

In his book, *Diffusion of Innovations,* Everett Rogers (2003) contributed models and concepts supporting a theory that attempted to explain how innovations are adopted (or not). This model's significant contribution is categorizing innovators into four groups: early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. Each group tends to relate and behave differently in leading, following, or slowing-down innovations, as shown in Figure 1 below (Rogers, 2003).

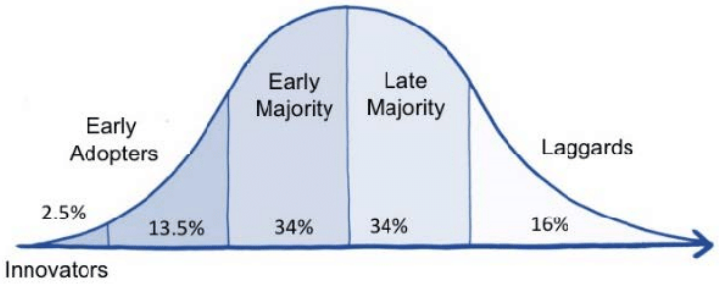

Figure 1 – Rogers' (2003) adoption/innovation curve.

There are many good ideas, intentions, and innovations that may elevate higher education's quality. Roger's insights invite us to focus on those individuals who will make the adoption happen, as well as those who may resist it.

The study innovations also require embracing a systemic view, which provides context to the system's units and how they interact. With this information in hand, it is possible to deliberately select the proper unit of analysis. If one were to study specific trees, as illustrated in Figure 2, we may intentionally choose our unit of analysis as the complete tree, the leaves, or the cells. Following the same analogy, for an institution of higher education, we may study its entire ecosystem, schools, and programs or the cellular structure represented in a course.

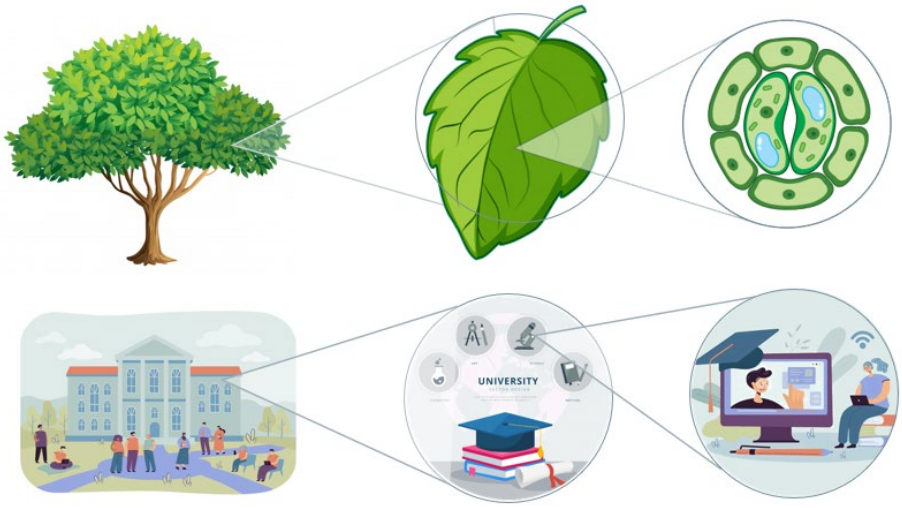

Figure 2. Studying the impact of quality in a course is equivalent to the study of the quality or health of a cell.

Image credit: Composite from Freepick.com.

The course becomes the unit of analysis because this is where innovation happens and is subsequently adopted. According to Bates (2021), "this is where perhaps the biggest challenge of successful innovation lies: ensuring the high-quality integration of online and classroom teaching."

Lens No. 3 – Instructional design as a catalyst for change

Finally, we acknowledge that new disciplines emerge to help navigate the new paradigms as new technological environments become available. The discipline of instructional design is a case in point. While it is not a new discipline and its origins can be traced back to instructional technologies during World War II and training in the industry, its contributions to higher education are most recent. In the digital era, instructional or learning designers can act as agents of change, thus, providing directions and accelerating the adoption process.

Returning to the illustration using trees, we may consider how to plant and harvest an orchard of apple trees. Experts from the Pennsylvania State University Agricultural Extension Office indicate that "Planning and preparing a site for a new orchard begins two to three years ahead of planting. Mistakes made in planning and planting an orchard cannot easily be reversed." (Baugher, 2016). Presumably, as seasons and weather conditions change and different plagues arrive, actions are required to monitor and safeguard the crop's quality continually.

There is a direct correlation between the previous example and the value that instructional design offers to guide the aspirations of institutions that want to ensure the quality of their educational offerings. Professional instructional designers offer institutions models, toolsets, and practices to help transform strategies into results. They provide a systemic approach to the learning process and remain laser-focused on the learning outcomes. Simultaneously, they may help formulate strategies (e.g., organizational, instructional, assessment, faculty guidance and support, and quality assurance) and support their implementation.

Lessons learned in the LAC region

The ideas presented in this paper are grounded on three decades of service to institutions of higher education in the Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC) regions. While this is a particular sample of institutions, many of which are later adopters of digital learning, it is precisely the uniqueness of the region and their degree of adoption that may shed light on the global implications for adopting this paradigm that is "new" for many. The lessons learned add texture and context to the conference organizers' central question: how to reimagine higher education quality in an age of uncertainty.

The lessons that this paper will include:

1. Institutional mindsets and strategies toward online education and digital learning.
2. Unaccounted cultural and language assumptions embedded in the online learning modality and its supporting technologies.
3. Faculty's disposition toward new teaching & learning paradigm.
4. The availability and level of expertise of instructional design professionals to help create quality courses.
5. The role of best practices and quality standards as benchmarks for excellence.

Lesson 1: Institutional mindsets and strategies

Strategies precede execution. Institutions of higher education know this fact very well and formulate strategic plans as part of their tradition. As stated by Guerra et al. (2017), "Strategic planning provides leaders a systematic, structured, and collaborative approach for examining current issues and future trends and their impact on the organization's capacity to attain its mission (p. 3)."

What is often less acknowledged is that mindsets precede strategies. To illustrate this point, we will further analyze Roger's (2003) adoption/innovation curve. Figure 3 depicts an adapted version of this curve. The original Y axis read "Market share %," now reads "Mastery/Quality of online learning" for the sake of our argument.

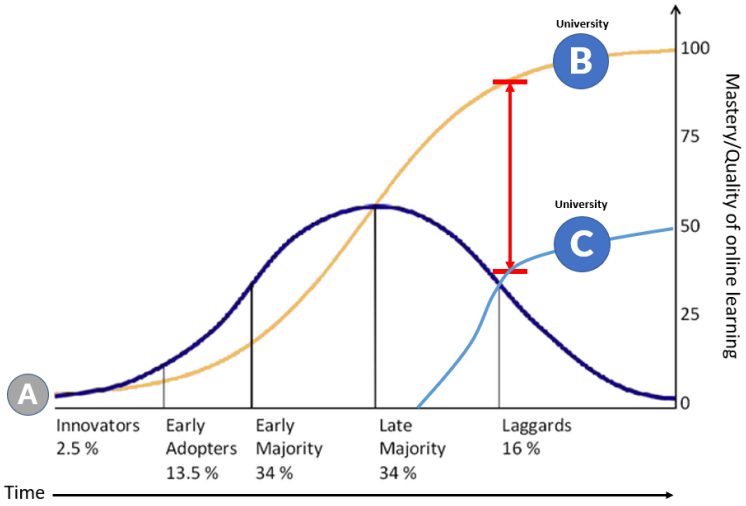

Figure 3. The path toward innovation, mastery, and eventual quality. Adapted from Rogers, Everett (2003). Diffusion of Innovations, 5th edition. Simon and Schuster.

The graph includes three lines.

Line A represents the categorization of innovators proposed by Rogers (2003). In the digital learning environment, one can recognize the academic community members (i.e., including faculty, administrators, staff, and learners) who fit into these categories.

Line B represents those institutions (or regions of the world) where innovators and early adopters of this digital learning paradigm reside. Many of these institutions collaborated in the conceptual models and made significant contributions to the imagination, design, development, and patent-creation of the technologies we use today. A case in point is the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, creators in the 1960's of the Plato System, the first mainframe-computer designed explicitly for education. Many of the features of modern-day Learning Management Systems (LMS) were available to the Plato community, including an authoring language for faculty, forums, message boards, online testing, e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, touch screen, remote screen sharing, audio-visual interface, and multiplayer video games. The Plato terminals were physically connected to the central server through an elaborate network of cables, mirroring the telephone systems available at the time. In contrast, today's LMS systems can be accessed wirelessly via any device capable of accessing the Internet.

While many institutions were earlier adopters of the LMS of the '90s, **Line C** represents a more recent wave of institutions and countries joining the digital learning space, many as current as the past few months.

The implications for this graph for current leaders are that:

1. Their institutions can benefit from later adopting this paradigm because they can access the latest technological solutions that other institutions with more years of experience have successfully used (or created) in the past. Nonetheless, taking the first steps requires a mindset to embrace the opportunity.
2. While initially, institutions may lack the methods needed, expertise is a commodity that is readily available from different corners of the world. Information, professional associations, tools, networking systems, and consulting services are abundant and can help build institutional capabilities.

Lessons and observations from the LAC Region

1. While there are some notable exceptions of early adopters in the region, a large percentage of institutions might be categorized in the late majority group. An even larger percentage of institutions were recently forced to initiate their remote operations due to the past year's social-distancing restriction. To their credit, these institutions acted courageously and decisively.
2. Even though the combination of LMS + Instructional design is now a desired practice, the reality is that there is a shortage in the region for professionally trained designers.
3. Institutions may already be experiencing a drop in student enrollment and a change in learning modality, which, in turn, impacts their operating budget. Although this is a complex and multifaceted issue, a new variable is typically absent: the institutional digital learning model. A digital model is different from the traditional face-to-face model because it defines an institution's digital identity. The identity is more than a remote learning offer (now a baseline and no longer a differentiating factor). Instead, it is a distinctive definition of the digital learning experience. In a world where classrooms are as transparent as fish tanks, the digital identity is every bit as critical (or even more so) than the communication of the face-to-face learning model.

Figure 4 –Higher education institutions are like fish tanks, each with unique features, sizes, and fish collections. In the new digital environment, the fish (students) are now in the Internet's open waters. They have tails and can swim to any place in the ocean. Students are a mouse-click away from other institutions and other countries. This sobering reality may motivate institutions to place the digital learning model at the center of their strategic planning process.

Lesson 2: Embedded assumptions in the technologies

Any technological solution is the product of a cultural framework. Given the value for expediency in some parts of the world, it is natural to microwave water in a cup to prepare tea. While this might seem like trivial use of technology for practical activity, the same act might raise uneasiness in other parts of the world where preparing tea is a cultural activity involving ceremonial preparation and presentation.

Similarly, technologies like Learning Management Systems (LMS) provide the most widely adopted technological infrastructure to implement online education and digital learning. Regardless of their geographic location, any institution can acquire and install the same platform in a matter of days and adjust the "default" settings to their language. However, like the unseen bottom half of an iceberg, there are many cultural assumptions embedded in the LMS that might get in the way of using this solution "as intended." There are assumptions about the level of autonomy of faculty and learners to engage in an educational dialogue; assumptions about what constitutes good teaching, class dynamics, and accepted evaluation practices, to name a few.

From a pedagogical point of view, it is essential to recognize that, while the technical features of any LMS add value to the teaching and learning experience, the underlying learning models underneath these features are still rooted in not-so-recent teaching practices from the '60s and '70s.

For example, the typical learning structure employed by most LMSs include:

1. Dividing a course into units or modules.
2. Presenting "content" in bite sizes.
3. Presenting learners with quizzes (e.g., multiple-choice, fill-in the blanks, match, rank, or write a short response).
4. Asking learners to respond to pre-defined discussion questions.
5. Repeating for the following modules.

6. Completing a final exam online (proctored or not) or submit a final paper or project.
7. Repeating for a different course or content.

In the same way a musical scale provides a structure for musical compositions, there is significant value in providing structure to the digital classroom. However, upon further inspection, the tool's underlying learning model may lead to a digital version of what the renowned Brazilian educator Paulo Freire called the "banking model of education" back in the '60s. In his influential book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), Freire introduced the term as a metaphor of a learning model where teachers treat learners as empty vessels and make knowledge "deposits". Furthermore, he argued, as we should argue today, that it is more essential to cultivate critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity than merely "transferring" knowledge or information. As evidence of this pervasive practice, notice how the term "online course" is often used to describe any type of curated content structured in modules and with limited or no opportunities for dialogue, interaction, collective problem-solving, or discovery. At best, there are a few evaluation activities consisting of simplistic multiple-choice questions requiring learners to "recognize" the information that was previously presented to them. Hence, the banking model of education continues to be alive and well thanks to it is new technological face-lift.

While it is possible to deliver "critical pedagogy" in a traditional LMS, as a reference to Freire's ideas, the implied learning model would not lead faculty and institutions in this direction. For a better alternative, follow the work of Dr. Sean Michael Morris at the Digital Pedagogy Lab. According to Morris & Stommel (2018, p. 4), "Critical pedagogy is less concerned with knowing and more with a voracious not-knowing. It is an on-going and recursive process of discovery". Being mindful of the unquestioned assumptions embedded in the technologies and in our teaching requires a critical analysis of the learning design models driving our practice. In conclusion, it is best to place technology as a second priority despite its mesmerizing effect only after an unwavering commitment to the learning experience's quality and effectiveness.

Lessons and observations from the LAC Region

1. The technology is intimidating and overwhelming for many faculty members. Besides the learning curve associated with any technological device, the migration to digital learning is challenging the very essence of their teaching practice. The embedded pedagogical model, along with the cultural differences between the LAC region and the United States (originator of many of the LMS's used today), may add additional difficulties to the adoption process. On the other hand, while the technology offers many universal benefits, it would seem crucial to retain the rich diversity of practices and values that exemplary educators bring to the learning experience. The Freire's of the world and the region need to continue to shape the technology's use rather than vice versa.
2. Faculty are perceived to be the figure of authority. Such expectations filter down to the learners and to the way the digital environment is structured, including how forums are configured and used. Depending on how the LMS is configured, learners might be able to engage in horizontal conversations with their faculty and peers or might be limited to only responding to prescribed discussion questions.

Lesson 3: Faculty's disposition toward new teaching & learning paradigms

As we explore the faculty's disposition toward adopting new teaching paradigms embedded in the technology and the digital learning experience, we begin to recognize at close range the additional challenges of achieving these goals. Examples of such challenges include:

Differences in the level of planning required between face-to-face and digital instruction.

The precision by which learning outcomes are formulated and assessed.

The novelty of being expected to share the responsibility of designing the learning process with others, like instructional designers and media specialists. At times, faculty may perceive these interventions as an assault on their "academic freedom".

University faculty members are committed to their students and their teaching practice. There are countless testimonials of the extraordinary efforts and long hours that the sudden migration to online teaching in 2020 demanded of faculty.

Simultaneously, the COVID-induced remote emergency teaching added additional stress to an already stressed system. Some of the stressors include:

Expectations for teaching excellence, given most faculty (unless they belong to a school of education) are specialists in their discipline and have not received formal educational training.

Different degrees of institutional technical and instructional support to ease the migration to the digital environment.

Competing priorities for other functions, such as research, and limited experience as learners and teachers in the online classroom.

Given that the expectations and benchmarks for quality in the physical classroom are different from what is expected in the digital environment, this shift demands a disposition to:

1. Reimagine their role as educators.
2. Acquire new skillsets.
3. Be willing to share the decisions and the planning that they did on their own with other professionals (e. g. instructional designers) that might be available to assist them in designing their courses.

Lessons and observations from the LAC Region:

1. The sentiment of "academic freedom" runs very deep in the teaching community, especially in higher education. This sentiment needs to be intentionally and carefully replaced by trust, collaboration, and teamwork in the new paradigm.
2. Faculty members are committed to their students, yet also feel challenged and overwhelmed by the digital environment's enormous demands. Hence, faculty support is paramount to help them appreciate the benefits of this modality for their learners and themselves, help them deepen their capacity to plan with greater precision and sharpen their skills in becoming more effective remote learning facilitators.
3. As the responsibilities in the digital classroom change, so do the time demands of faculty. The unit of expected "contact hours," used to define the number of credits assigned to a course and the compensation paid faculty, now requires further analysis or, perhaps, alternative metrics.

Lesson 4: The contributions and capabilities of instructional designers

As with the technology, institutions also imported instructional design (ID) from outside their region. While the newcomers assume that the discipline and the LMS are new inventions that arrived together in the digital learning world, nothing could be further from the truth.

ID has its roots in the '40s due to the rapid solutions needed to train the Second World War forces. The field of instructional technology evolved as the technologies and learning models evolved from Skinner's teaching machines to audio-visual instruction and computer-based education. Its most significant participation has been in the industry and, more recently, in academia. One of the discipline's essential contributions is the systemic

approach to analyzing and designing learning solutions to address human performance and learning challenges. However, when these guiding principles are unknown or misunderstood, ID might be perceived only as a "process" to structure, homogenize, and streamline the course production process.

Why is this background relevant to ensuring quality offerings via ID contributions in the LAC region? For two reasons: It matters to the expectations of the professionals serving in this role; 2) and what are their qualifications and the suggested training.

Suppose faculty and institutions entrust the representatives of this discipline to guide them through unchartered territories, much as a patient entrusts a surgeon to do an intervention. In that case, this demands greater scrutiny (or professional development) for the individuals performing these roles.

The role of instructional design has been recognized in the region, at least, for the last ten years. Yet, to our knowledge, there are no specialized academic graduate programs, professional organizations, or research journals. This is a sharp contrast to the options available in the United States, it's country of origin.

As academic institutions in the LAC region embark on the digital arena, they may need to cultivate new skill sets among faculty and instructional designers alike. Until professional programs are made available, institutions may have to develop them internally.

Lesson 5: The adoption of quality standards

Innumerable stakeholders and variables are affecting the quality of the digital learning experience. Perhaps, one of the elements that might expedite the process and bring institutions closer to the intended goal includes adopting quality course design benchmarks, such as those formulated by Quality Matters or equivalent organizations. In the absence of the optimal conditions detected in the region, such as the level of maturity of the institutional strategy, the readiness and preparation of the faculty to embrace the new modality, and the limited availability or level of expertise of instructional designers, the best guardrails to guide the process might be the adoption of clearly articulated course design standards.

A novice cook is best served by following a recipe. A child learning to ride a bicycle can benefit from the use of training wheels. Similarly, standards that reflect research-based best practices may allow an institution to move their starting line years ahead of where it would be in comparison to discovering these practices on their own.

According to the Meridian-Webster Dictionary, standards are "something set up and established by authority as a rule for the measure of quantity, weight, extent, value, or quality." They represent a distillation of what a professional body recognizes as examples of best practices.

It is fitting to leave this part of the quality piece of the puzzle for last. Alternatively, more than a portion of the puzzle might be considered the frame that allows all the other elements to fall in place.

Given the challenges inherent in a later start of the digital journey, adopting existing quality standards promises to be a practical solution to level the plain field of quality.

All of the above considerations may bring the educational community in individual institutions to the same page. This includes using the same language, sharing best practices within the same framework, and cultivating quality within every course and across programs and schools.

Conclusions

In the context of continuous and fast-paced change, no single solution will address all institutions' unique needs and contexts worldwide. Even when solutions are effective, like in medicine, they will have an expiration date. Similarly, our best strategy in the classroom is to continue to question our assumptions, become learners again, explore, and continue to share our questions and insights.

Institutions will likely interpret and react differently to the current climate of uncertainly. Some potential reactions might mirror one of the following scenarios:

1. **Wait for the return to "normal."** Influenced by a natural resistance to change, how much is at stake in the current paradigm; budgetary or political constraints; or resistance to technology, institutions might err on the side of staying on a holding pattern with the expectations that everything will return to the "normal."
2. **Take action to step up to the new digital reality.** Most institutions in the region and throughout the world responded quickly to pivot immediately, ready or not, to emergency remote teaching. Once initiated, they have invested in steering the entire learning community in this direction. After the emergency response and accepting the new realities, it becomes evident that there is a need for a paradigm shift beyond adopting the technology. A coordinated effort to educate, discover, reflect and acquire new capabilities and mindsets will pave the way to redefining how educational quality will be defined and implemented throughout the institution. Adopting standards of best practice, expanding the collaboration with other institutions that are on the same path, and being open to growth and continuous innovation are some of the most effective strategies to transform uncertainty into certainty.
3. **Collaborate with a broader community of stakeholders to co-create a higher future potential.** The ultimate challenge to reimagine higher education is more encompassing than our attention to the quality of the digital environment. Alternatively, it can be perceived as a systemic challenge that impacts all aspects of society, including how to serve a broader range of stakeholders with less representation, such as individuals with physical or mental disabilities. Facilitating these types of conversations that may lead to the emergence of new models also requires a different set of tools from the ones typically available (e.g., academic papers, conferences, and committees). Fortunately, some initiatives promote deep listening practices, the appreciation and integration of multiple perspectives, and the co-creation of future realities. Otto Scharmer's (2018) Theory U is a case in point. He specifically addresses the questions: How do we learn in the face of disruption, and how do we learn from the future as it emerges. In his proposed methodology, seeing leads to perceiving, which leads to deep listening, and is followed by the conscious prototyping of the future.

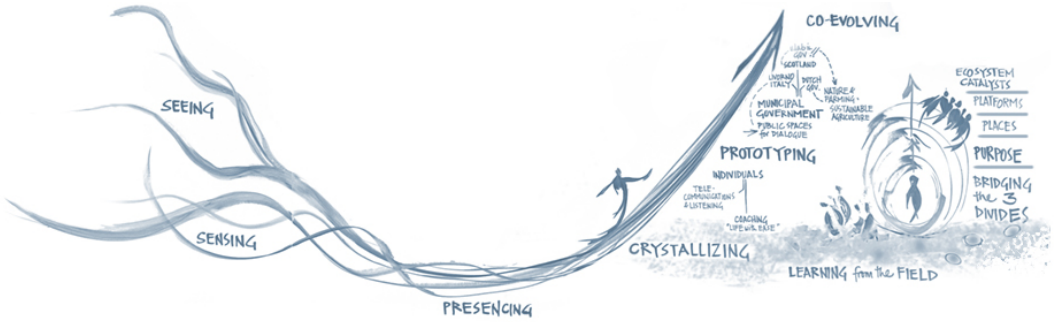

Figure 5 – The process of prototyping- According to the Presencing Institute (2021). "A prototype is a way of "learning by doing." It's something you do that generates feedback from others that helps you evolve your idea into action. No prototype is too small or insignificant. What's important is that it is something concrete that you do to learn and evolve."

Ultimately, the COVID-19 crisis, coupled with the digital disruption, might create the conditions for an educational transformation comparable to the Industrial Revolution. Furthermore, because technology allows us to democratize knowledge, every individual, institution, country, and region of the world now have the opportunity to contribute valuable lessons to enlighten our collective path.

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THEME 3. QUALITY ASSURANCE SUPPORTING CHANGING LEARNER JOURNEYS

Reimagining innovation and transnational quality assurance; the case of EUTOPIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on the case of EUTOPIA, an Alliance of six Universities under the European Universities initiative. We report on the EUTOPIA educational model, its potential for inter-university integration and the implications for quality assurance. The European Universities initiative is without any doubt one of the most ambitious programmes to achieve innovation in today's European Higher Education Area. Universities have been given the brief to go beyond established policies and practices in order to transform higher education and to experiment with new forms of inter-university collaboration. Quality control has a core role to play in this process. We share data from EUTOPIA's first six months and make our learnings relevant to policy makers striving to devise a flexible, yet robust, external quality assurance system as well as to professional community engaged in this field. We close the paper with providing directions to quality assurance research.

Introduction

Quality assurance is one of the key commitments and, criticisms withstanding, achievements of the Bologna Process. The fact that almost all higher education institutions in countries in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) have comprehensive internal quality assurance processes in place and an external quality assurance system with (in most cases) an independent quality assurance agency is undoubtedly a success. At the same time however, the experience of Bologna has shown the challenges involved in crossing national and policy boundaries and the need for building on the success of the past to develop new tools in order to achieve the 2025 European Education Area vision for an open, fluid and transnational European Education. This paper draws on the case of EUTOPIA, an Alliance of six Universities under the European Universities initiative. We report on the EUTOPIA educational model, its potential for inter-university integration and the implications for quality assurance.

The European Universities initiative is without any doubt one of the most ambitious programmes to achieve innovation in today's European Higher Education Area. Universities have been given the brief to go beyond established policies and practices in order to transform higher education and to experiment with new forms of inter-university collaboration. Quality control has a core role to play in this process. Bearing in mind that there is no one single type of European university, the current experiment also offers a unique opportunity for reflecting, revisiting and reimagining the design of quality assurance processes particularly in the cases when new forms of collaboration are introduced. In the case of EUTOPIA, the aspiration is to go beyond the traditional patterns of European cooperation, namely joint degrees and exchange of staff and students. EUTOPIA aims to establish the foundations of a confederal inter-institutional campus by installing and testing shared approaches to teaching & learning, research and innovation. Among others, this includes educational formats and pedagogical approaches that endorse the vision of openness through connected learning pedagogies.

In more detail, EUTOPIA's educational model uses, as its core building blocks, existing credit bearing learning units (in the form of modules, seminars or assignments). These already form part of the study programmes currently offered by the EUTOPIA partners all of whom are committed to student- centred, research-led education. The learning units are selected according to four criteria; interdisciplinarity, global orientation, active learning and inclusive pedagogy. These units constitute the core and the conduit for establishing Learning Communities through bringing together partners involved in relevant, complementary teaching and research. The Connected Learning Communities allow for flexible interinstitutional co-creation between staff, students and other societal stakeholders from all partner institutions. EUTOPIA, therefore, establishes a lean and robust core, drawing on existing provision for developing bottom- up innovation involving, from the start, students and staff on the process.

Sustaining innovation and excellence in education is a well-known challenge for academia; we address this by combining best practice in and through the EUTOPIA Learning communities. The connected networks of staff, students and stakeholders establish a dynamic, international context for all partners involved, leading to a fertile environment for innovation and bottom up change in existing pedagogic practice. We argue that building from existing good practice can provide a way to move beyond the pitfalls of harmonization and deliver innovation from within, achieving cultural change in the process.

Monitoring and enhancing these processes is, evidently, needed for understanding and identifying the conditions for success in a truly European university. This asks for the introduction of a complex system of quality management that is aligned with our approach of combining learning units from already running study programmes in six different quality assurance/enhancement ecosystems. It goes without saying that the quality control of the EUTOPIA building blocks that form the basis of the learning communities is somewhat unique since it refers to learning units instead of fully-fledged study programmes, which additionally adds to challenges connected with the task of establishing a functioning and flexible enough system.

In addition to the challenges of diverse institutional setups and different legal frameworks of the EUTOPIA core partners, the challenges of designing an appropriate quality control system for EUTOPIA is also associated with its unique pedagogical offering that aims to surpass the well-known challenges of joint degree programmes. Hence, the EUTOPIA uniqueness moves away from the ready-made approaches to quality control, but with a clear common reference point in the ESGs. Furthermore, EUTOPIA aims to substantially deepen the integration of cooperating educational institutions normally seen in such joint-educational offering initiatives and runs this as a developmental project. This basically translates to the fact that EUTOPIA, as a confederal inter-university, is an institution in transformation which has to – before its final shape comes into being – assure the quality of its processes forming the nuclei of the 'new' institution. As a result, this could cause tension between the aim for innovation and quality control, which is a common feature in such exercises. The tendency of conforming to standards, originating from the quality control angle, is frequently reported to impede the aims of innovation and the breaking of new ground (see Ng and Ang, 2011), which in fact may be the sole factor of institutional success and survival in the long run.

To sum up, we aim in this paper to present EUTOPIA's 'edge of chaos' (Langton, 1990) as a balancing act between pedagogical innovation and quality assurance processes that can prove informative to similar pedagogical initiatives (e.g., European Universities consortiums). We share data from the monitoring activities of our first six learning communities and make our early learnings relevant to policy makers striving to devise a flexible, yet robust, external quality assurance system as well as to professional community engaged in this field. We close the paper with providing directions to quality assurance research and seek to establish ongoing dialogue with colleagues involved in relevant initiatives.

Ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes

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ABSTRACT

AQU Catalunya has designed and successfully implemented a methodology to carry out ex-ante accreditation of short learning programmes (SLP). SLP provide targeted and specialised training and are a gateway between the higher education system and the professional training system.

The Secretariat for Universities and Research was the promotor of the project while AQU Catalunya developed the methodology closely with the Catalan Public Employment Service and the Catalan Continuous Training Consortium, since the validated programmes will be included in the Catalogue of Professional Qualifications. Thus, this project exemplifies how quality assurance agencies (QAAs) might stablish alliances in order to tackle a global challenge locally "HEIs responsiveness to labour markets' demands" (SDG17). Besides, the project keeps an eye on SDG4 "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all".

The pilot Guide was approved on February 2020 and the Agency has already reviewed and approved the design of seven programmes from the ICT field. Nine universities (from a total of twelve universities existing in Catalunya) have shown their interest to deliver at least two SLP that has led to the analysis of more than thirty proposals. As a result of the process, 33 proposals have been approved as SLP. The paper will describe the methodology and conclude with an analysis of the strengths and challenges ahead for the external assessment of SLPs.

Introduction to micro-credentials

Micro-credentials might be defined as "Any credential that covers more than a single course but is less than a full degree" (Pickard, Shah & Simone, 2018)[1]. Micro-credentials include awards, badges, certificates, nano-degrees, etc. They are not new in our societies. There are non-formal certificates. When they meet certain conditions (for instance, learning outcomes are assessed, they have defined ECTs or time associated to its completion, etc.) they are stackable; i.e. they can be accumulated into a larger credential or degree (ECIU, 2020)[2].

According to the MICROBOL project[3] a micro-credential is a small volume of learning certified by a credential. Micro-credentials have explicitly defined learning outcomes at a QF-EHEA/NQF level, and indication of associated workload in ECTS credits, assessment methods and criterion, and are subject to quality assurance in line with the ESG. In the European Higher Education Area context, micro-credentials can be offered by higher education institutions or recognised by them using recognition procedures in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention or recognition of prior learning.

Ex-ante Accreditation Programme of Short learning Programme by AQU Catalunya

[1] Pickard, Laurie & Shah, Dhawal & Simone, J.J.. (2018). Mapping Microcredentials Across MOOC Platforms. 17-21. 10.1109/LWMOOCS.2018.8534617.

[2] https://www.eciu.org/

[3] https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/microbol%20desk%20research%20report.pdf

AQU Catalunya has implemented a methodology to carry out the ex-ante accreditation of SLPs. SLPs provide targeted and specialised training for the entire workforce. The upskilling and re-skilling that will provide this type of programmes are crucial to ensure adaptability and employability in the marketplace building a bridge between the higher education system and the professional training system.

Traditionally, the professional training has been circumscribed to level 3-5 of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). However, the increasing need for upskilling and re-skilling of people have resulted in further proliferation of SLPs at level 6 (Bachelor) and level 7 (Master) of the EQF.

The initiative of implementing the validation of SLPs was led by the Catalan Government (Secretariat for Universities and Research) and was designed with the collaboration of the Catalan Public Employment Service and the Catalan Continuous Training Consortium, since the approved programmes will be include at the Spanish Catalogue of Professional Qualifications. It is to note that the Barcelona Digital Talent alliance (formed by public and private organizations) was a relevant driver for the success of the project and more specifically, the Mobile World Capital Barcelona funded part of the pilot project.

Thus, this project exemplifies how quality assurance agencies might stablish alliances in order to tackle a global challenge locally, which in this case is to increase HEIs responsiveness to labor markets' demands (SDG17).

The pilot Guide was approved on February 2020 and the Agency is working on a revised version to be approved the first semester of 2021. It is worth mentioning that the methodology considers two different assessment moments: i) SLP design; ii) capacity of the university to implement the SLP.

The pilot project focuses on the need of the region to improve the training of the workforce in the field of ICT, though it is expected to assess new fields next year, as for example automotive and renewable energies. At this moment, AQU Catalunya has reviewed the design of seven programmes from the ICT field and nine universities have shown their interest to deliver at least two SLPs that has led to the analysis of more than thirty proposals (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. List of SLPs in the field of ICT assessed during 2020[4]

Short learning programme	**Universities**								
	UAB	**UdG**	**UdL**	**UOC**	**UPC**	**UPF**	**URL**	**URV**	**UVic**
Java Back End Web Developer	●					●	●		
Open Source Back End Web Developer	●						●		●
Front End Developer	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Android Mobile Developer	●		●	●	●		●	●	●
Consultor CRM	●	●			●				
Cloud Deployer	●			●	●	●	●		
Data Scientist	●	●		●		●	●		
TOTAL	**7**	**2**	**2**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**6**	**2**	**3**

The Guide defines the characteristics of SLPs. Those are:

- Targeted to level 4 (Bachelor) and 5 (Master).
- ECTS between 5 and 60.
- Recognition of ECTS by existent official degrees.

[4] UAB: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona; UdG: Universitat de Girona, UdL: Universitat de Lleida; UOC: Universitat Oberta de Catalunya; UPC: Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya; UPF: Universitat Pompeu Fabra; URL: Universitat Ramon Llull; URV: Universitat Rovira I Virgilli; UVic: Universitat de Vic- Central Catalunya.

- Providers: Catalan higher education institutions.
- The program must meet the needs of the labour market.
- Addressed to non-traditional students.

The assessment dimensions are the following:

1. Programme description: university, name of SLP, EQF level, relationship with the professional family, ECTS, mode of delivery, offer.
2. Justification: relevance of the program to labour market, and potential of the institution to deliver the programme.
3. Aim and Learning Outcomes (level, relevance according disciplinary field)
4. Access, admissions and support to students.
5. Study program (planification): structure of the curriculum, coherence between intended learning outcomes, mode of delivery, and teaching and assessment activities.
6. Teaching staff and support staff: suitability and sufficiency.
7. Material resources and services: suitability and sufficiency.
8. Expected results: academic results, student satisfaction, employability.

The assessment procedure follows the regular decision-making process in the Agency. Nonetheless, due to the nature of the evaluation there was a need to nominate an ad-hoc committee composed by experts of the field coming from the academia and the professional life. As a result of the evaluation, the design of seven SLP (from 8 to 16 ECTS) and 33 university proposals have been approved. The outcome will be published at AQU Catalunya web site and the proposals have been included in the Catalogue of training specialties of the State Public Employment Service (SEPE) to be offered as a regular training programmes.

The experience has allowed to reflect about the strengths and the drawbacks of the assessment of SLPs. Among the strengths it is worthwhile to note that AQU Catalunya has been useful as a tool for a society need. The external assessment ensures the recognition of the SLPs in higher education institutions. Moreover, it ensures its quality and improve the trust in these programmes. However, it is true that the range of assessed programmes it is narrow and is circumscribed to Government strategic needs. Due the workload associated to the programmes external review and the short period of time life of those programmes (as they need to adapt very quickly to the market needs), it seems reasonable to look for another strategy more focused on the HEI internal quality assurance system.

On the other hand, during the process has become evident the need to strengthen connections and establish a common language among the actors involved.

How external quality assurance can support the HEIs' handling of diversity among students

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ABSTRACT

Like in the rest of the world, the HEIs in Denmark today enroll a much more diverse group of students than 10-15 years ago. This means a new task for the HEIs in welcoming a new type of learners. The introduction of the term student-centred learning (SCL) in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) has put a new and strong focus on quality assurance of the learning situation, not least on how the different needs of different students are taken into account. By sharing knowledge and discussing how SCL has been implemented in the national EQA system, the Danish Accreditation Institution will give a bid for an answer to the question how external quality assurance can contribute to support the HEIs' handling of diversity among students?

During the last decades, HEIs all around the world have enrolled a growing number of students. This is also the picture in Denmark, where the increased enrollment means a diverse student population at the HEIs. E.g, many students come from non-academic family backgrounds, due to globalization and migration, more students come from different cultural backgrounds and more students start or resume higher education later in life. All of this means that HEIs have a new role in welcoming new types of learners and their different needs in order to ensure that all students will meet the learning objectives.

The question is how external quality assurance can contribute to support the HEIs' handling of diversity among students? In introducing the concept of student-centred learning (SCL) in EQA, the revised system of institutional accreditation in Denmark points at a solution to the question.

Diversity of students in ESG

In 2015, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) was revised and introduced a new ESG 1.3 on SCL, which states: "Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active part in creating the learning processes (…)"[1]. ESG 1.3 unfolds the standard with different guidelines. E.g. that the implementation of SCL "respects and attends to the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths."[2]

The analysis is available in English in an abbreviated edition in Egron-Polak, Eva (ed), *Internationalisation of Higher Education. Developments in the European Higher Education Area and Worldwide*, DUZ Academic Publishers, Berlin 2018, p.23-39

The idea behind the ESG is that "(…) the application of the ESG is influenced by variety of factors including legislation, external quality assurance frameworks, national and institutional context and culture and

[1] *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, 2015, Brussels, Belgium, p. 12

[2] Ibid, p. 12

programme specificities."[3] This means that there is no one-size-fits-all implementation of SCL across the European Higher Education Area. As a response to the new ESG 1.3 and to prepare how it should be addressed in the external quality system in Denmark, the Danish Accreditation Institution (AI) conducted a thematic analysis to elucidate Danish understandings and practices of SCL.

The analysis[4] is based on interviews with 24 interviewees from different Danish HEIs[5]. In order to ensure that ESG 1.3 would be addressed in an efficient and fit-for-purpose way in the revised EQA system in Denmark, the focus of the analysis are:

- How does SCL work in practice at Danish HEIs?
- How can we go about addressing SCL in an external quality assurance system such that it suits the institutions' practices?

The main findings of the analysis

Firstly, the analysis shows that the concept of SCL has been a well-integrated element of the educational approach, based on active learning and student involvement, which has characterized the Danish education system since the 1970s. Although SCL is widely implemented at the practical level, the focus on SCL in relation to quality assurance is new to the Danish HEIs.

Secondly, the analysis shows that at many Danish HEIs, the concept of SCL is connected to the handling of a diverse student group. E.g when it comes to retaining new types of students and preventing drop out as well as in relation to ensuring that different social and personal conditions around the student do not constitute an unnecessary obstacle for the student to achieve the learning objectives. Thus, SCL is about both the pedagogical and didactic organization of the teaching as well as about that HEIs offers various supportive activities that aim to support the student in relation to private and personal matters.

Thirdly, and maybe the most surprising outcome of the analysis is that SCL covers a broad range of understandings across the Danish HEIs. Not least in relation to the implementation of the concept in practice.

The below figures illustrate and explain the broad variety of understands which coexists at Danish HEIs.

[3] *Student-centred learning: approaches to quality assurance*, EUA 2019, p. 5

[4] *Hovedperson i egen læring*, Danmarks Akkrediteringsinstitution, 2016.

[5] Universities, university colleges, academies of professional higher education and artistic higher education institutions

- **Variation** in educational and didactic learning styles
- The teacher's role in **facilitation** and **planning** the learning proces
- **Flexibility** with respect to the student's study path
- The student's **motivation** with respect to learning and actively participating in the learning situation
- Providing **feedback** on the student's ongoing academic development and performance in exam situations
- Accommodating **diversity** across the student community
- **Backing** from heads of institutions for the learning style
- **The student's readiness** to engage in independent reflection and action
- An offer of **support services** for students where private/personal factors present an obstacle to learning
- **Recruitment** of teachers with the appropriate educational and didactic skills and a passion for the institution's teaching style
- The right **physical environment** for learning which supports e.g. group work and encourages students to interact with teachers

SCL addressed in the revised system for institutional accreditation in Denmark

The new Accreditation Order[6] and the guidelines[7] from the fall 2019 presents how SCL now is an independent requirement in the external quality assurance framework in Denmark.

[6] *BEK nr 853 af 12/08/2019 – Bekendtgørelse om akkreditering af videregående uddannelsesinstitutioner og godkendelse af videregående uddannelser*, Ministry of Higher Education and Science, Denmark, 2019

[7] *Institutional Accreditaion 2.0 Guidelines*, The Danish Accreditation Institution, 2020

The main points are:

- The institution has to consider, choose and prioritise its approach to SCL and quality assures the activities it entails.
- There are no specific expectations about what the institution decides, but there is a general expectation that they are well-considered.
- When it comes to quality assurance, the institution systematically plans its own initiatives, implements them, assesses the results of the initiatives and follows up on these.

We would suggest that a main distinction between SCL approaches can be established. One, which is closely related to the organisation of the programme. It can be variation in teaching methodologies, so that teaching takes the students' prior experiences and qualifications into account (e.g. using pedagogical/didactical tools such as feedback, project work, the teachers' role as facilitator etc.). The other concerns student-centred support functions, e.g student counselling, careers guidance, more psychological support functions etc. to overcome structural barriers to the students' learning.

With this open approach to SCL where the HEIs decide on their own strategies and following activities according to their context, the EQA system leaves room for all the different approaches to SCL, which were unfolded in the analysis. In the Danish context, the answer to the question raised in the beginning of this proposal will be, that when addressing SCL in EQA, the already existing practices for SCL at HEIs are lifted into the top management's strategic work and therefore provides a more systematic and focused work with the individual HEIs' goals for supporting diversity.

THEME 4. MAINTAINING TRUST IN THE FACE OF UNCERTAINTY

Cross agency capacity building: peer learning and building trust

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ABSTRACT

Purpose

Quality assurance agencies across the world are many and varied. They may be regulatory or advisory, maybe both; established for a considerable time or relatively new; with an international footprint or local. Common to all, is that both have something to learn and to give.

The paper also discusses the Marjorie Peace Lenn Centre of INQAAHE, which is devoted to capacity building, and outlines the strategies intended to support member agencies and quality assurance professionals.

Design/methodology/approach

A case study approach is adopted to show practice-based activities and outcomes that can be transferred to other agencies wishing to increase their engagement and partnership activities, support their institutions and grow their networks.

Findings

This paper shows how quality agencies working in different roles and regulatory spaces can work together to develop a synergistic approach in which each benefits from the other. Approaches to cross agency capacity building are shared and explained showing how peer learning has enabled the agencies to grow through the mutual trust that has evolved.

Originality/value

Readers will see how agencies with different profiles and agendas can work in partnership to build trust and achieve mutual benefits.

Keywords *Capacity-building, peer learning, building trust.*

Introduction

Quality assurance agencies and professionals around the world engage in an ever-changing landscape of technological advances, public policy shifts, and movements in academic approaches to higher education provision. Adapting to this constant input requires an openness to change, an ability to rapidly respond, and a solid grounding in the goals and purposes of quality assurance activities. Sharing best practice and engaging in thoughtful dialogue about quality assurance activities is a critical way to learn from peer organisations in order to manoeuvre the complexities of higher education regulation.

This paper sets out how two quality agencies, on different continents, working in different roles and regulatory spaces work together for the benefit of both and have developed a synergistic approach to ensure that each benefits from the other. The approaches to cross agency capacity building are shared and explained to show how peer learning has enabled the agencies to grow through the mutual trust that has evolved.

The Quality Assurance Agency for higher education in the United Kingdom (QAA UK), was established in 1997, having evolved from various predecessor organisations. QAA UK has built an international reputation including membership of international organisations and a worldwide portfolio of activity.

The Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB) was established in 2002 following the development of an 'educational choice' act of the government which opened degree provision to institutions beyond pre-existing universities (such as private institutions and college providers). As one of four quality assurance agencies in Ontario, and of 10 across Canada, PEQAB plays a central role in coordinating the sharing of best practice.

The third component of this paper outlines the current activities of the Marjorie Peace Lenn Centre (MPL) of INQAAHE that are intended to support the professional development of quality assurance professionals, as well as being a network connecting peers, sharing innovations, and discussing issues in quality assurance activities. The role of the MPL in supporting peer-to-peer engagement and capacity building will be discussed.

Recognising the value of bilateral and multilateral relationships, the authors share with the audience the steps they have taken to establish a mutually beneficial relationship. They explain how agencies can engage with each other, despite differences in distance, approaches, regulatory systems and other factors, how they can learn from one another and build mutual trust.

THE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION QUALITY ASSESSMENT BOARD

PEQAB capacity building

In Canada, higher education responsibility is devolved to the provincial authorities. Within that provincial oversight, quality assurance practices are also devolved, and there are currently 10 quality assurance agencies in operation across the country. The majority of provinces have one agency, typically housed within provincial government departments and responsible for institutional reviews (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec), while the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Council is a pan-provincial agency providing institutional reviews for the four provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland.

The Province of Ontario, which hosts over 40% of all Canadian PSE students, has four different quality assurance agencies.

The Council of Ontario Universities Quality Council is a member-based organization providing institutional audits and new program approvals exclusively to public universities. The Ontario College Quality Assessment Service (OCQAS) provides public college institutional reviews and program standards audits; and the Indigenous Institutes Quality Assessment Board (IIQAB), a new player in the Ontario QA landscape, is an independent body currently developing quality assurance frameworks for institutions and programs that fall under the Indigenous Institutions Act of 2017. The fourth agency, and the primary focus of this section, is the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB), an arms-length agency of the Government of Ontario's Ministry of Colleges and Universities. Through an act of legislation, it is mandated with performing quality assurance reviews of degree level programming offered by institutions that do not have their own act of legislation. Simply put, PEQAB is responsible for quality assuring degree programs offered outside of the traditional university system, such colleges, private and out-of-province providers.

This preamble demonstrates the wide range of QA actors in Canada each of which play a small but significant role. The 'smallness' of Canadian QAA's is also apparent in the size of the operations. On average the QAA's have two to three full time staff members, with PEQAB having the largest team at 6. An implication of this is

that capacity building also occurs on a smaller scale – usually developed through relationships and informal means both with other QAA's as well as with institutions and other stakeholders. This allows for relationships that are strong and mutually beneficial, if sometimes bi-lateral rather than multi-lateral. The following sections will outline the ways in which PEQAB works closely with national and provincial colleagues as well as with the institutions whom we serve.

National capacity building

Grounded in the non-binding Canadian Degree Qualification Framework (CDQF) of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, (CMEC) higher education provision across the country is comparable if not compatible[1] by establishing common expectations upon which the quality evaluations rest. The interpretation and application of the CDQF is not mandated and serves as a reference point for most provinces and QAA's who develop their own standards and benchmarks. Ontario also has a provincial qualification framework which supports common expectations across three of Ontario's QAA's, though each is able to interpret and apply them as they see fit[2].

Given the latitude to adopt and adapt the Qualifications Frameworks, the desire to reflect, benchmark and seek peer advice, is what led PEQAB to initiate a 'cross-country call' in the early 2010's. The informal invitation was simply to connect with colleagues in order to create a community of practice amongst the QAA's. The monthly calls were accepted by some QAA partners with some trepidation. Recognizing that many of the QAA's are housed within, or actually are units of, ministries of education, it is within reason that open dialogue and sharing activities was perhaps unusual. Nevertheless, the continued engagement of colleagues in monthly one hour call created a safe environment to discuss concerns, relationships with ministries and Boards, as well as sharing of best practice.

While the opportunity for more formal ties between the agencies is apparent, the establishment of relationships, building of trust, and recognition of QA as a matter that crosses provincial boundaries are significant accomplishments for an area that has long been seen as an internal matter.

Ontario provincial activities

Within the province, the relationships between the QAA's are strong in both formal and informal activities. Formally the QAA's have co-hosted a bi-annual conference since 2010 focusing on learning outcomes. The conference hosts senior management and QA representatives from all institutional types across the province, as well as researchers and policy makers.

Informally, there is frequent and communication between the agencies on a variety of matters. In some cases relating to Ontario Qualifications Framework, such as recognizing the alignment with the Universities Quality Framework, or contributing to the development of the new Indigenous Education Quality Framework. In an effort to support full understanding of the different process and activities at the different agencies, PEQAB and OCQAS conducted a 'staff exchange' of sorts where a PEQAB member joined an OCQAS review as an observer. That activity provided significant insight into both the ways in which QA is enacted as well as how the institutions are responsible to different processes.

PEQAB institutional support activities

[1] The Quebec system of CEGEPS for example, is a unique model of college and pre-degree provision

[2] IEASC is the exception to this as they are not bound to the OQF.

As Canadian Quality Assurance largely falls within government or quasi-governmental agencies, capacity building has not traditionally been an area of activity and indeed relationships between PEQAB and the institutions have sometimes been strained. Yet the restructuring and introduction of a new CEO brought an era of transparency and collegiality to the operations. One of the primary activities was to reinvigorate a working group of the public colleges (which are the main applicants to PEQAB). The College Degree Operating Group (CDOG) is made up of college institutional quality representatives, who meet twice a year to discuss common issues and invite PEQAB to join the meeting for a session. This has made significant improvements to the relationships between PEQAB and the institutions as it provides an opportunity for the institutions to voice their concerns, issues of interest, and provide feedback. This 'feedback loop' is an important piece of the relationship, as any changes to PEQAB standards, benchmarks, policies and practice are presented for consultation to the institutional partners. This activity has significantly changed the dynamic from the perception that quality assurance was 'put upon' the institutions, to a sense that quality enhancement is co-created in partnership. The success of this model has been beneficial for PEQAB, but it has also supported the development of peer relationships across the institutions. In 2016 this model was replicated for the Private and Out of Province providers (POPDOG) with similar success.

Research

Research has been significant in supporting capacity building both at the national/provincial agency level and the institutional level. Again, as a typically government/quasi-governmental activity Canadian quality assurance has a scant research history. With the restructuring in the late-2010s, PEQAB created space for empirical research on quality matters. Topics exploring issues such as student engagement, degree recognition and progression have engaged both QAA's and institutions as partners. There have been multiple presentations to both academic and policy and institutional audiences on the various projects and multiple publications are under development. The cascading effect of this has developed the sharing of best practices, development of new policies and practices, and further research into activities and practice within the institutions. This is creating an engaged community of quality assurance representatives who understand QA is not static nor definitive but an ongoing dialogue towards improving higher education quality.

International capacity building

PEQAB's participation in the international community of higher education quality assurance is through joint research activities, participation in international conferences and professional communities, hosting international delegations, and in staff exchanges. For example, PEQAB staff have contributed to international literature on trends in quality assurance through the Bologna's Rectors Conference, INQAAHE conference proceedings and book chapters. PEQAB is often engaged in peer learning activities, such as hosting international delegations, researchers and other higher education professionals, and also participates in staff exchanges. For example, in 2017 PEQAB and Croatian Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) participated in a staff exchange, that greatly contributed to the knowledge and understanding of both agencies. Given the relationships with the Ontario Government, PEQAB also sits on the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials committee which supports national activities on the matter.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION, UNITED KINGDOM (QAA UK)

The QAA UK was established in 1997 and evolved from a number of predecessor organisations that each included an element of quality assurance within their remits. QAA UK is the UK's higher education body, an independent, not for profit, agency with an independent chair. It is the only body recognised to assess the standards and quality of UK Universities and represents both UK higher education and its member organisations. Education is a devolved matter in the UK with each of the four nations operating higher education in different ways. In England, QAA UK has statutory status as 'Designated Quality Body' (QAA,

2018a), it is recognised and trusted across the four nations and works in partnership with funders and regulators. Statutory responsibility for regulating and registration of higher education providers resides with the respective national funders and regulators: in England, The Office for Students, in Northern Ireland, The Department for the Economy, in Scotland, The Scottish Funding Council, and in Wales, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales.

This devolvement of education makes the arrangements complex and QAA UK deliver tailored quality approaches for each nation, supported by UK-wide activity to maintain a coherent system for quality. The UK Quality Code and the Frameworks for Higher Education apply across all four nations with QAA being the only body that is officially recognised to undertake independent assessments and evaluations; these are used by the national funders and regulators to inform their regulatory decision-making.

In 2019, QAA UK became a membership organization and, in 2021, has 267 member institutions across the UK representing 95% of universities. QAA UK comprises four distinct activity areas: Quality Assessment England; Membership, Quality Enhancement and Standards; Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Europe; and International and Professional Services. From over 200 employees in the mid-2010, QAA UK has restructured to its current configuration of around 100 staff with offices in England, Scotland and Wales. In addition to the full-time and part-time employees QAA has a pool of around 250-300 higher education specialists who work within the higher education sector and support the QAA UK's review, research and other activities.

QAA UK's work is wide-ranging and includes:

- Maintaining the national frameworks and reference points for higher education: the UK Quality Code (QAA, 2018b) and the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (QAA, 2014),
- Conducting independent peer review assessments in all UK nations; the expectations and practices from the UK Quality Code are key reference points and underpin all QAA UK's review activity in UK,
- Development of sector-wide and member-specific resources including advice and guidance, effective practice, subject benchmark statements and characteristics statements, some of which have regulatory status in some of the UK nations,
- Conducting reviews of UK transnational education (TNE) as the only UK organization working in TNE that is fully endorsed by the UK higher education sector representative bodies to undertake these,
- Engaging internationally to raise the profile of UK higher education, to contribute to and support the development of quality assurance and to help build capacity in newer quality agencies.

National capacity building

Universities in UK are autonomous organisations, they are recognised by, but not owned by government. They each have responsibility for ensuring the quality and standards of all the awards that they make; the QAA UK works in cooperation with universities and the UK higher education sector more broadly to develop and manage the quality standards and frameworks. Through its activities as the recognised UK's higher education body for quality and standards, QAA UK engages in a wide range of cross-sector activities that contribute to national capacity building in relation to many aspects of higher education. Through its work, QAA UK represents the sector and its members in local and national networks and creates opportunities to bring individuals and institutions together to discuss areas of mutual interest. The landscape in the UK of multiple agencies covering different constituencies, like there is in Canada, does not exist so the work that QAA UK does in national capacity building is in working with other sector organisations, representative and governmental bodies to raise awareness of the approaches to quality assurance and enhancement across the UK and to provide briefings, advice and guidance as well as contribute to national agendas through networks, conferences and debates.

Research

QAA UK undertakes a range of research as part of its role as the UK quality and standards agency. It makes wide use of its broader engagement with the UK higher education sector to access specialists to contribute to the different foci of the research that it carries out. QAA UK staff act as facilitators in bringing subject and topic specialists together to carry out research projects; much of the developing outputs are shared with the wider sector through consultations which might be conducted through online surveys, webinars and workshops with the aim of reaching a consensus that can accommodate the variations that exist within and across UK higher education. QAA UK also commissions research such as feasibility studies into potential new workstreams.

Where QAA UK brings together working groups to carry out research, it calls for expressions of interest from specialists across the sector and aims to achieve cross-sector representation in each group. All groups will aim to include student representatives to ensure the student experience and the student voice is reflected in the outcomes.

All research and associated consultations are widely publicised although engagement in some of the agency's activities is restricted to member organisations. Outcomes and outputs from the research are published and made available either through the QAA UK website (QAA, 2021a), or within the member resources area.

Research carried out in this way has the dual benefit of building capacity across the sector, empowering individuals and growing networks for both QAA UK and for those who are involved in the research.

International capacity building

QAA UK has developed a number of close relationships and strategic links with many international quality assurance agencies and regulators and has memoranda of understanding where a more formal relationship, with tangible outcomes, is beneficial to both partner agencies and higher education in both countries (QAA, 2021b). QAA UK represents the UK higher education sector on the Quality Beyond Boundaries Group (QBBG) which it co-founded with quality assurance agencies and regulators in seven countries who are involved in transnational education (TNE).

As part of its international footprint, QAA UK is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), is listed on the European Quality Register (EQAR), is a full member of The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and is an Observer on the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN).

QAA UK extends its work with UK sector agencies into its international activities and provides advice, guidance, briefings and workshops for organisations such as British Council and the Department for International Trade. Through these, and its collaborative partnerships with local agencies and regulators QAA UK gains access to Ministries of Education, Embassies and Consulates.

QAA UK work with their partner agencies and organisations to produce resources for their members and other UK higher education providers. These include Country Reports which include high-level information and intelligence about regulations, opportunities and TNE experiences within the country.

QAA UK has completed over 45 in-country reviews of UK higher education TNE over the past 20 years (QAA, 2021c), more recently involving local agencies and regulators in the review activity including observation at in-country meetings and contributions to the development of case studies, country reports and other resources. The new model for TNE review, launched in March 2021, will provide opportunities for local bodies to be further involved in the process and outcomes (QAA, 2021d).

All partnerships into which QAA UK enters are on the basis of ensuring mutual benefit, enhancing the reputation of UK higher education and facilitating a better understanding of the assurance of quality and standards of both the UK and the partner country.

Examples of capacity building work in which QAA UK is involved included capacity building workshops for individual agencies designed to meet specific needs that those agencies have identified. QAA UK shares its learning from its 20+ years of experience with those newer to quality and standards and, in turn, learns from others' practice.

In mid-2020, QAA UK convened an International Partners' Forum to provide an opportunity to share organisations' experiences of responses to COVID-19. Over 20 countries were represented by more than 50 participants. Following the forum, a resource, International Examples of Practice was published (QAA, 2020).

Capacity Building case study

The United Arab Emirates is a key destination for UK higher education TNE; QAA UK has formally engaged with quality agencies, regulators and the government in UAE since 2013 when it signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Knowledge and Human Development Authority in Dubai. Since this first Memorandum, QAA UK have had regular engagement with its counterparts in UAE. Highlights of this collaboration are shown in Figure 1.

The MoU with KHDA has been followed by memoranda with Ras Al Khaimah Economic Zone Authority (RAKEZ) and with the Commission for Academic Accreditation. A further MoU is planned to be signed with Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) later in 2021.

The collaboration has included the setting up of international quality networks (QBBG), jointly conducting reviews of UK TNE, overseeing revisions to institutional licensure and programme accreditation, co-writing two country reports (2017 and 2021), delivery of QAA UK's International Quality Assurance Programme in Dubai, guest speakers at each others' events and co-hosting workshops. In 2021, representatives of all four agencies, CAA, ADEK, KHDA and RAKEZ contributed to two webinars for QAA UK member organisations looking at the regulatory landscape in UAE for UK transnational higher education.

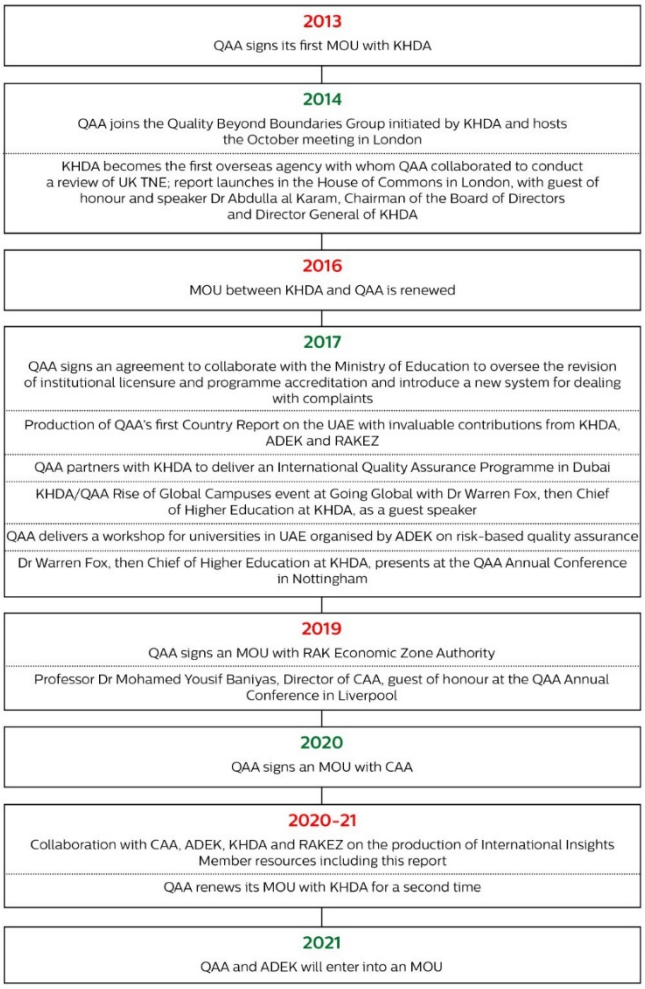

Figure 1. Collaboration between QAA UK and UAE agencies and regulators (QAA, 2021e)

The collaboration between QAA UK and the UAE agencies have grown and evolved to meet the changing needs of the agencies, their member organisations (where relevant) and the sectors that they represent to enable both capacity building of the agencies and that of their constituencies.

INQAAHE

The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education is the largest global network of quality assurance organisations. Established in 1991, it is a member-based organization with the mission 'to create, collect, and disseminate information on current and developing theory and practice in the assessment, improvement and maintenance of quality in higher education' (INQAAHE, 2021a). The organization hosts conferences and fora, publishes a journal, provides commentary on topical issues, and offers guidelines for best practice in quality assurance as well as evaluation services. There are 19 quality network members (such as the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and the Asia Pacific Quality Network) and approximately 300 'full' or 'associate' member agencies (such as the UK QAA and the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board. The Marjorie Lenn Peace Centre of INAAHE provides education and capacity building support to quality assurance professionals around the world through its online training centre, quality assurance academic programmes, and research (INQAAHE, 2021b)

A primary activity of the organisation is to bring QA professionals together annually at conferences and fora to support peer to peer exchanges. In the time of COVID, the organization has provided both the 2020

conference and 2021 forum virtually in order to continue to support is members through the difficult time. Similarly, online workshops have supported professional development in area such as online quality assurance reviews, to support the pivot that agencies were struggling with.

INQAAHE also provides materials to support the professional development of quality assurance professionals both in agencies and institutions. There is freely available curriculum for diploma/MA programs, and a recent partnership with MaxKnowledge provides a wide range of resources to member organisations. INQAAHE also supports the formal education of quality assurance professionals in developing countries by awarding two scholarships annually for either the Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Education (Quality Assurance) at the University of Melbourne or the Master's degree on Quality Management and Evaluation in Higher Education at the Open University of Catalonia (UOC).

Supporting research and peer to peer partnerships is another critical component of INQAAHE's work. In order to support research, every year the organisation a provides grants to undertake or commission research in areas relevant to quality in higher education. Similarly, an annual call for capacity building is disseminated, and INQAAHE provides approximately $10,000 USD to support supporting capacity building and enhancement of quality assurance systems of its members through peer partnerships.

In a more formal capacity, INQAAHE also provides outreach and support, and consults on a wide range of activities with a range of partners. For example, INQAAHE has partnered with UNESCO, the World Bank and other international organisations to support the recognition of quality assurance as a critical component of higher education systems.

As INQAAHE now celebrates its 30th anniversary, a range of activities are planned throughout the 2021 year and will present new opportunities to engage with colleagues near and far, and continue to support the incredible work of the agencies.

Establishing a mutually beneficial relationship

PEQAB and QAA UK are both quality assurance agencies but they are very different in many ways – their size, their remit, their footprint, their constituencies, their geographic location, amongst others – how can they learn from one another and build mutual trust?

The UAE case study shows different ways in which agencies can collaborate in bilateral and multilateral ways and that establishing a mutually beneficial relationship takes time and evolves over time. PEQAB and QAA UK are at the start of their collaboration journey but, during COVI-19, lockdowns and bans on international travel, representatives of each agency have started a dialogue, organized online meetings between the respective Chief Executives, co-authored conference papers, agreed a programme of workshops and begun to set out the priorities for a Memorandum of Understanding.

One significant benefit from COVID-19 is the irreversible changes to communication and technology for interaction. Conversations that might have started in the anterooms at an international conference would probably have continued through an email conversation and an in-person meeting at the next event with long periods of time passing between each meeting or engagement. Whilst videoconferencing and meeting through online tools cannot fully replace the in-person meetings and networking, it does make the world a much smaller place where individuals and agencies can start to engage in bilateral and multilateral conversations far more readily and effectively. These conversations allow the participants to start to build their understanding of each other and identify where one can learn from the other.

CONCLUSIONS

The role of quality assurance agencies is multi-faceted. Typically operating at the national or subnational level, traditionally quality assurance agencies have had relationships with government and institutions. These vertical relationship are critical for QA to be success, legitimate and utilized. Yet, the horizontal relationships

across national realms are equally important to support continuous improvement of QA activities. Relationships built on peer networks of support help formalise and professionalise the field of quality assurance which, despite a 30-year existence, is still an emerging field of inquiry and profession practice. As such, cross agency capacity building and peer learning is critical to ensure the future of this field which puts quality at the centre of higher education provision. The role of INQAAHE to bring agencies together and support dialogue is meaningful and critical to spark bilateral opportunities, and the recognition of the value of the peer to peer capacity building by PEQAB and UK QAA leadership has been central to developing strong linkages based on mutual interest, trust and shared enthusiasm.

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A longitudinal study on the levels of awareness among universities regarding Certified Evaluation and Accreditation

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ABSTRACT

This paper surveys changes in the awareness among universities regarding Certified Evaluation and Accreditation (CEA), a Japanese accreditation system. Data collated from questionnaires submitted to universities certified by the National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education were analyzed to track statistically significant changes between the first and second cycles. The items that showed changes in the awareness of the universities were further disaggregated. These results were analyzed to determine reasons for the shift, particularly correlations with the status quo and the need for improvement in this particular evaluation system, including "effectiveness in helping quality enhancement," "evaluation exhaustion (workload)," and "gaining public understanding and support."

Introduction

According to the Certified Evaluation and Accreditation (CEA) introduced in 2004, all universities are required to be evaluated every seven years by the evaluation organization certified by the Ministry. The CEA was established 17 years ago so the evaluation is now in its third cycle. In Japan, the following three metrics—"effectiveness in helping quality enhancement," "gaining public understanding and support," and "evaluation exhaustion (workload)"—are viewed as challenges for the CEA, according to the Central Council for Education. This study explores how universities perceived the effectiveness of the CEA system and how these perceptions have changed between the first and the second CEA cycles.

Method

The study draws on results of the questionnaire survey conducted on the 119 universities certified by the National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education (NIAD-QE) in both cycles (the first, 2005–2011; the second, 2012–2018). The number of responses was 115 universities (82 National, 29 Municipal/Prefectural, 4 Private) out of 119 universities. The questionnaire had 11 sections. Sections 1–6 were relevant to this study. The titles of the sections are shown in Table1. Each section contains three to twenty-five items. Total items are 78 (74 questions by 5-point scale, 4 questions by 2-point scale).

Table 1: Questionnaire of the second cycle (The original is in Japanese)

1. Evaluation standards and viewpoints
2. Evaluation methods and contents
3. The workload and schedule of the evaluation
4. Orientation meetings and training sessions
5. Evaluation results (evaluation report form)
6. The outcomes and impacts of evaluation

Results

The universities responses to each item were compared between the first and the second cycles. The analysis utilized t-tests and chi-squared tests. A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the response in first and second cycle in each question, which required answers on a 5-point scale. With regard to the questions s used 2-point scale, a chi-squared test of independence was calculated. Significant differences were observed in 25 out of the 78 items. The breakdown is as follows: 3 items "effectiveness in helping quality enhancement"; 5 items "gaining public understanding and support"'; 14 items "evaluation exhaustion (workload)"; and the remaining 3 items comprised questions regarding evaluation in general. From a qualitative point of view, the responses in 23 items showed a negative change from first cycle to second cycle, save for two items about "evaluation exhaustion (workload)."

The most frequently observed 14 items concerned the "evaluation exhaustion (workload)." Examples of items are shown in Table2. The finding that 14 out of 25 items were related to "evaluation exhaustion (workload)" does not necessarily mean that most universities' are concerned about this issue. This is because the questionnaire was specifically designed to investigate the appropriateness of CEA, so the questions are inevitably focused on workload. On the other hand, except for the two items related to reducing the workload, many of the items had negative answers to the evaluation, which is an issue even considering the possibility of various interpretations.

Table2: Summary of descriptive statistics for items related to "evaluation exhaustion (workload)." between 2 cycles (*N*=115)

(5 Heavy - 1 Light)

	First Cycle		Second Cycle	
Questions	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
3.1 The workload required for the evaluation				
(2). Addressing the "Checkpoints During Site Visits" presented before site visits.**	3.51	.61	3.94	.62
(3). Advance preparations for site visits. **	3.48	.64	3.78	.62
(4). The day of site visit. **	3.25	.54	3.56	.65

Notes. ** $p < .01$,

There were three items related to "effectiveness in helping quality enhancement" (Table3). The universities' responses became negative in the second cycle. This indicates a need for quality enhancement in the CEA. In response to this, in the third cycle of CEA started in 2019, a follow up system was introduced to the universities that pointed out "Needed Improvement." The perspective of internal quality assurance was also introduced as a priority evaluation at the same time.

Table3: Summary of descriptive statistics for items related to "effectiveness in helping quality enhancement." between 2 cycles (*N*=115) (5 Agree - 1 Disagree)

	First Cycle		Second Cycle	
Questions	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
5.1 The contents of the valuation report form				
(1). The contents of the evaluation report form were appropriate for the quality control of your university's educational and research activities.*	4.12	.51	4.00	.48
6.2 Outcomes from and impacts of self-evaluation				
(9). Faculty and staff gained an understanding of the importance of self-evaluation.*	3.58	.75	3.41	.73
(10). Faculty and staff knew and understood the contents of the evaluation results.*	3.65	.65	3.48	.68

Notes. * $p < .05$

There were 5 items related to "gaining public understanding and support" (Table4). The absolute value of the averaged ratings of items related to "gaining public understanding and support" was low compared to the other items.

Table4: Summary of descriptive statistics for items related to "gaining public understanding and support." between 2 cycles (*N*=115) (5 Agree - 1 Disagree)

	First Cycle		Second Cycle	
Questions	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
2.1 About self-evaluation.				
(3). We were able to complete an easily understandable self-evaluation form to support general public understanding of our university's general situation. **	3.90	.68	3.63	.68
3.3 The amount of effort required for the evaluation was appropriate for the evaluation.				
(3). The amount of effort required for the evaluation was consistent with your university's				

support for public understanding and educational and research activities. **	3.55	.74	3.29	.79
5.1 The contents of the valuation report form				
(3). The contents of the evaluation report form were appropriate for gaining public understanding and support for your university's educational and research activities. **	3.85	.73	3.59	.71
6.2 Outcomes from and impacts of self-evaluation				
(13). Students (including future enrollees) can now attain better understanding and skills. *	3.33	.66	3.12	.74
(14). We have obtained widespread public support and understanding.**	3.52	.75	3.29	.73

Notes. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$,

***Discussion*:** Of the three items targeted, "gaining public understanding and support" tended to be lower than the other two. However, statistical caution dictates against a myopic view about the urgency of raising public awareness of the evaluation. For example, evaluation results that do not meet the criteria have newsworthy characteristics and can raise the awareness of evaluation in society, but are likely to constitute fragmented and distorted information. It is desirable that the university will be improved, and the significance of CEA will be recognized as a result by rigorously re-tooling the education approach under the new system, pointing out possibilities for improvement and proceeding with follow up.

Fostering International trust: three cross-border initiatives led and Shared by CDGDC, KHDA and UK NARIC

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces and outlines the activities of three international initiatives aimed at fostering trust amongst international stakeholders in TNE and its quality assurance. TNE, or higher education offered by degree-awarding bodies in countries other than that in which they are based, has been growing year on year over the past 20 years or so, in terms of student numbers, education institutions involved, sending and receiving countries involved, and variety of models.

Its increasing strategic importance is reflected in being included as a goal for growth in both Universities' internationalisation strategies across the world, and in sending and receiving countries' governments' international education strategies. Its strategic importance is set to grow further as the international higher education sector seeks to find innovative ways to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath.

TNE, in all its forms, including online delivery, has inherent progressive potential to widen international access to quality and relevant education, in particular in locations where there is unmet demand, contributing to the development of strategic skills needed to support social and economic development. It has also the potential to offer a more sustainable alternative to internationalising higher education than international student mobility, both environmentally sustainable and financial, as capable to mitigate the risks to eventual restrictions to international travel, either due to global crisis, or national policies, including student visa policies. .

However, despite its progressive potential, its growth, and its increasing strategic importance, there are still several challenges and hurdles to the expansion of TNE as an acceptable mode of earning a qualification, which prevents TNE from realising its progressive potential as a way to widen access to quality and international education.

The Cross-border Quality Assurance Network (CBQAN)

Background

The development of international higher education has brought cross-border education into the world focus. In order to promote international cooperation and raise awareness among countries of the importance of quality assurance for cross-border education, UNESCO and OECD jointly developed Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education in 2005, which "encourage the establishment of a comprehensive, fair and transparent system of registration or licensing for cross-border higher education providers wishing to operate in their territory; encourage the establishment of a comprehensive capacity for reliable quality assurance and accreditation of cross-border higher education provision, recognizing that quality assurance and accreditation of cross-border higher education provision involves both sending and receiving countries; consult and coordinate among the various competent bodies for quality assurance and accreditation both nationally and internationally; contribute to efforts to improve the accessibility at the international level of up-to-date, accurate and comprehensive information on recognized higher education institutions/providers",.

At present, few of formal international platforms are dedicated to facilitating cross-border education quality assurance.

At the 4th ASEM Education Ministers Meeting (ASEMME4) held in Kuala Lumpur on 13-14 May 2013, China's initiative to establish CBQAN was welcomed by the Ministers.

On 10-11 December 2013, the 1st Working Group Meeting on Implementing ASEM Recognition Bridging Declaration was held. To establish CBQAN is one of the Working Group's three actions plans. The Working Group considered the proposal to establish the CBQAN Secretariat to advance the CBQAN initiative. The agreement was reached that the Secretariat would be based at China Academic Degrees and Graduate Education Development Center (CDGDC, China).

Purpose

CBQAN aims to:

- build a communication and cooperation platform for stakeholders of cross-border higher education quality assurance in Asia and Europe;
- facilitate mutual understanding and learning;
- promote quality-assured academic mobility and personnel exchanges;
- facilitate the healthy development of cross-border higher education in Asia and Europe;
- explore approaches to developing a platform for collaboration of quality assurance in international cross-border higher education eventually; and
- support student mobility and fair recognition of qualifications.

Mission

CBQAN shall take actions to:

- promote, encourage and share comparative studies in respect of quality assurance systems of cross-border higher education in Asia and Europe;
- formulate standards and guidelines for cross-border higher education quality assurance in Asia and Europe; encourage cross-border quality assurance activities based on the standards and guidelines; promote effective international cooperation on cross-border higher education;
- provide advisory information services on the cross-border education policy, quality assurance regulations, and cooperative programmes for the purpose of providing assistance to cross-border higher education institutions, experts and students in Asian and European countries;
- analyse the challenges in cross-border higher education quality assurance and propose possible solutions.

Milestones

- On 20 December 2016, the CBQAN Inaugural General Assembly was held in Haikou.
- On 19 December 2018, the CBQAN 2nd General Assembly took place in Dublin, Ireland.
- CBQAN membership network has been expanded to 16 bodies of 13 countries.
- Currently, the practical work is under way, including, drafting the *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education by CBQAN*.

The Quality Beyond Boundaries Group (QBBG)

Quality Beyond Boundaries Group (QBBG) is a network of international quality assurance agencies that has been formed to address the growing quality assurance challenges and opportunities associated with cross border higher education (CBHE).

QBBG brings together the major sending and receiving countries of CBHE higher education. The member agencies of QBBG include Skills Future (Singapore), The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (Hong Kong), Knowledge and Human Development Authority (Dubai) and Malaysian Qualifications Authority (Malaysia) as the major hubs/receiving countries of CBHE. QBBG also includes the QAA (UK), The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), WASC Senior College and University Commission (USA) as representatives of the major sending countries of CBHE.

QBBG was initiated in 2014 as a platform for member agencies to increase collaboration, share information and form meaningful partnerships for the development of quality assurance of transnational higher education.

QBBG's vision is to build - A trusting alliance of international quality assurance agencies implementing a collaborative and innovative future for transnational quality assurance to ensure that today's global students are tomorrow's global citizens.

QBBG has three main objectives:

1. CONNECT - Connect to develop a zone of mutual understanding and trust among QBBG members.
2. COLLABORATE - Collaborate on the quality assurance processes.
3. COMMUNICATE - Communicate with stakeholders about quality assurance of CBHE and implications of CBHE.

QBBG have worked on various collaborative initiatives including:

1. QBBG commissioned a research study to compare the policies and practices of each of the eight-member agencies to assess what the commonalities and differences are in the quality assurance approach adopted by each in relation to transnational education. As a result of this project, a report was developed titled 'A Comparative Study of Quality Assurance Agencies', which compares and analyses the attributed, conceptual foundations and processes of member quality assurance agencies with a specific focus on international branch campuses.
2. QBBG commissioned two special case studies of global campuses, Heriot-Watt University and Hult International Business School. Both institutions have a presence in multiple jurisdictions and allow students the opportunity to move between campuses over the duration of their academic programmes.
3. QBBG has also supported the development of an Academic Integrity Toolkit. The project was funded by INQAAHE and led by TEQSA. TEQSA commissioned a group of scholars to share research, develop and deliver a suite of workshops and create a toolkit to assist integrity practitioners with promoting academic integrity and addressing contract cheating within their institutions.
4. In addition, QBBG members have shared ideas, concepts and best practices on the development of quality assurance standards for online/distance education.

The TNE Quality Benchmark Scheme (TNE QB)

As discussed above, different countries have in place different systems for the quality assurance and recognition of TNE qualifications. Yet these, where they exist, are to be regarded as national solutions, usually responding to and operating in the context of the local national circumstances and political drivers of the sector. As such they are not always capable of meeting the reassurance needs of the international education community.

Over the last year, Ecctis – the agency that has managed on behalf of the UK government the qualifications recognition service (UK ENIC, formerly UK NARIC) since 1997 – as part of its global recognition services, has developed a new international service that aims to offer the missing global solution for the quality assurance and recognition of TNE qualifications. This is intended as a solution that might be capable of bridging the different existing national solutions (where they exist), offering a platform for international cooperation across the quality assurance and qualification recognition communities, and contribute in this way to improving the international understanding of and trust in TNE qualifications of demonstrated quality and standards.

The TNE QB service compounds four key international dimensions:

<u>International scope:</u>
This means that TNE QB applies to all TNE operations, regardless of the location of origin or delivery, hence it applies for example equally to UK, Australian, German, USA, Chinese or Indian TNE, wherever it is delivered. This is important as TNE QB is intended as global and not a national solution.

<u>International standards:</u>

TNE QB can be international in scope because it is underpinned by international standards, standards developed in consultation with international experts and in alignment with existing, internationally reference points, such as for example the UNESCO / OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education, the UNESCO / CEO Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education , as well as regional reference points such as European Standards and Guidelines and the Chiba Principles for the Asian-Pacific region, and paying close attention to the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications. Indeed, the TNE QB scheme aims at offering that reassurance against international principles without which, as the Global Recognition Convention reminds us, it might be difficult to provide the required foundation upon which trust can be built and recognition granted to TNE qualifications.

International peer-review:
The scheme can review TNE operations against international standards by utilising international peer-review. Our review teams are composed of peer-reviewers from and with understanding of the host country education and regulatory landscape and peer reviewers from and with understanding of the sending country education and regulatory landscape. There is also an additional and very important level of international peer scrutiny offered by an independent Advisory Board composed of leading international experts and practitioners in the field which offers strategic advice to the development of the scheme, and acts as an independent accreditation board reviewing the outcomes of peer reviews. This ensures that reviews are aligned with the international standards and are based on sound evidence. The board plays a key role in underpinning international trust in benchmarked operations as well as in developing global strategic engagement, which is the fourth international dimension.

International cooperation:
TNE QB is embedded in international cooperation. Indeed, it aims to catalyse international cooperation across the quality assurance and qualifications recognition communities and between sending and receiving countries. This is key to build that shared understanding and trust required to improve the recognition of TNE qualifications. Thus, over the past months, UK ENIC has developed formal strategic cooperation with the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) and the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) with a view to developing platforms of dialogue and cooperation to support the growth of quality TNE in the regions, including through the sharing of expertise and experts. UK ENIC has also developed formal cooperation with the China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE) and the Egyptian National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) with a view to informing cooperation in TNE review activity in these countries and regions.

Very importantly, it has further developed cooperation with the China Service Centre for Scholarly Exchange (CSCSE), the Chinese national qualification recognition body, with a view to helping with the recognition of TNE qualifications obtained in third-countries. CSCSE will be able to use TNE QB reviews to inform their recognition decisions. This opens-up the opportunity for Chinese students to study on TNE programmes offered outside China, being able to return to China with a qualification that will be recognised. And of course, it also opens-up the opportunity for TNE providers to enrol Chinese students on their TNE programmes outside of China to meet the needs of those students who might not be willing or unable to travel to the home campus.

This agreement, which Ecctis/UK ENIC is working to replicate with other international credential evaluators, is really what TNE QB is about, facilitating the recognition of TNE qualifications, their global portability, and the growth of quality TNE.

Conclusion

These initiatives demonstrate that a shared view is emerging across quality assurance and qualification recognition bodies. This is the view that quality assurance and qualification recognition activities should be enablers not inhibitors of quality TNE, and that key to realising this shared view is to join forces, to develop shared understanding and trust to the benefit of what the international education community has at heart, quality education. It is about working together to unleash the progressive potential of TNE for more inclusive, sustainable and relevant paths to learning.

This view is based on the realisation that TNE should not only be seen exclusively as a high-risk activity posing challenges to quality, and perhaps national sovereignty, but also and in particular a more flexible although less traditional way of learning capable to widen access to international quality education and contribute to developing global citizens with the skills required to support and thrive in our increasingly globally connected communities.

Learning Analytics for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Universities are using Learning Management Systems (LMS) to facilitate their students. Learning Management Systems can be used to improve the quality of higher education. LMS can contain massive amounts of data related to learning activities and these data can be used to enhance higher education. However, the majority of universities are using LMS only to deliver the learning content to their students. We have identified three main problems in higher education and we proposed an Intelligent Interactive Learning Analytics tool named Linsight to solve the identified problems. Students can easily track their learning progress, create their personalized learning environment, and improve their grades using the Linsight. At the same time, lecturers can improve their teaching methods, Learning Designs, and identify students at risk of failure at the initial stages. The ultimate goal of Linsight is to improve the Higher Education quality.

Keywords: Learning Analytics, Higher Education, Quality, Technology Enhanced Learning

Introduction

School education in Sri Lanka is directed towards teacher-centered education. School students sit for three exams (Grade five scholarship exam, G.C.E Ordinary Level (O/L) exam, and G.C.E Advanced Level (A/L) exam). G.C.E. Advanced Level (A/L) is considered the most competitive exam in Sri Lanka because this is the university entrance exam and only a limited number of students who obtain the highest marks in Sri Lanka get the opportunity. School students are more likely passive learners where they spoon-feed the knowledge from their teachers and they keep the knowledge in their memory. However, in the university, students are directed towards learner- centered education and at the beginning, students find it difficult to adjust to this setting.

Most of the universities in Sri Lanka are currently using LMS to deliver the course contents. At the same time, students are doing self-learning activities using the internet. Learning is bursting out of the classroom and becoming informal, social, and mobile. Traditionally, LMS products have not been very useful in managing learning that happens outside the LMS. Lecturers are designing the courses beforehand and measure the effectiveness at the end of the teaching process. They are not facilitated to track the effectiveness of their Learning Design throughout the teaching process. There are huge amounts of data available in LMS but not all the data is used to enhance the interaction between the learner and the lecturer. Lecturers are not given support to enhance their teaching practices using real-time analytics. Nowadays, students use various resources in addition to the course material posted on LMS to complete a course. Sometimes a student might not use course materials on LMS and can refer to other resources such as online courses, YouTube videos, quizzes, blog articles, and eBooks. Lecturers cannot track whether the students are progressing through the course depending only on the materials he/she posted on LMS. If a Lecturer was able to find out the actual means of how a student progresses throughout the course, the lecturer can rethink his/her Learning Design or about his/her lesson plans and revise them to get the maximum benefit. Lecturers can provide feedback to students on their performance and can recommend certain resources to students.

In the traditional LMS, students cannot find out whether they are at the risk of failure, track their progress, and find out subject areas that need to improve. If students would be able to predict their performance, they might work to achieve it

There are three main problems faced by higher educational institutions currently.

1. Not taking the maximum benefit from data collected in Learning Management Systems.

2. Quality Assurance Cells collect the students' feedback at the end of the course since there is no real-time feedback to the lecturer.
3. There is no proper way to track the learning activities that happen outside the Learning Management Systems.

This research aims to improve the quality of higher education by finding solutions to the above mentioned three problems by using Learning Analytics technologies. We surveyed students to find out what they required from a Learning Analytics system. Then we used existing Learning Analytics plugins currently available for Moodle and analyzed their features. Based on findings we designed and implemented an Intelligent Interactive Learning Analytic Visualizer called Linsight which is currently under experimental level with the undergraduate students at Univerity of Colombo School of Computing (UCSC). Linsight can be used to facilitate both students and lecturers in a Blended Learning environment and also can be used to improve the quality of higher education.

Background

Learning is described as any process that enables a change in a person's capacity to understand themselves and the world around them [1]. It helps to acquire and modify existing knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Blended learning has become part of mainstream education. Blended learning concepts have rapidly developed during the 21st century. Many universities move to adopt Blended Learning to deliver their courses to improve active learning among students. There are several advantages of Blended Learning in higher education, however, at the same time, there are examples of drawbacks like poor learning outcomes and low pass rates [2]. One reason for these drawbacks is poor Learning Design which does not properly match the learning outcomes with the learning activities. Therefore, course design, teaching methodology, and learning activities are required to support the learning outcomes.

The learning experience of a student in a Blended Learning environment can be designed using various kinds of interactions and activities. Learning Design is the process used for designing the student's learning experience using interactive learning activities. Consisting of a cycle of activities such as, "challenge definition, conceptualization, elaboration, enactment, evaluation and reflection, and back to remodeling" [3]. Learning Design activities have an impact on learning performance [4]. E-learning systems can store data about students' learning activities. The technology that is used to analyze the student's learning-related data is known as Learning Analytics. Teachers can analyze large volumes of student data generated by student learning activities to enhance learner experience and to customize their course designs. The field of Learning Analytics is useful in this regard, as it can utilize a large amount of data available in the domain, and provide real-time evaluations of the Learning Design. Higher educational institutions can derive multiple advantages from Learning Analytics by having different data analyzing methods to produce summative, real-time, and predictive insights and recommendations [5].

Learning Analytics

Learning Analytics is a significant area of Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL) that has emerged during the last decade [6]. Application of big data and analytics in education can suggest the likelihood of students succeeding in, and completing, a course [7]. It has the potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of learning in primary, secondary, and post-secondary education. Learning Analytics is largely concerned with improving learner success [8].

Learning Analytics is rooted in data science, data mining, artificial intelligence, practices of recommender systems, online marketing, and business intelligence, and is not a genuine, new research area [7]. Educational institutions were already involved in institutional research and evaluation before the widespread emergence of e-learning or big data. At the beginning of the 21st century, socially and pedagogically driven approaches to analytics began to emerge [6]. The introduction of Learning Management Systems, which afford the amassment and visual representation of large amounts of student information, has enabled the active development of the Learning Analytics field in the last five years [9].

Learning Analytics has been coined with different definitions. Looney and Siemens state, "Learning Analytics is the use of intelligent data, learner-produce data, and analysis models to discover patterns and connections within that data and to predict and advise on learning" [10]. Learning Analytics was defined in EDUCAUSE's

Next Generation learning initiative as "the use of data and models to predict student progress and performance, and the ability to act on that information" [8]. However, the most suitable and most cited definition in literature is the one proposed by the 1st Learning Analytics and Knowledge Conference held in 2011 [6].
"Learning Analytics is the measurement, collection, analysis, and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for understanding and optimizing learning and the environment in which it occurs".

Learning Analytics targets different stakeholders, including students, lecturers, tutors, mentors, instructors, researchers, system designers, administrators, and faculty decision-makers. Learning Analytics tools can offer feedback to students to evaluate themselves concerning their performance while comparing themselves with the rest of the classroom. At the same time, these tools provide additional information to lecturers where they can identify potentially underperforming students, student engagement and performance, and the effectiveness of their teaching practices. Educational institutions can use Learning Analytics to support decision-making, identify students at risk, enhance student success [11], improve student recruitment policies, determine hiring needs, adjust course planning and make financial decisions. Advantages of Learning Analytics to different stakeholders are given in Table 1.

Table 1 – Facilities provide by Learning Analytics to different stakeholders

Stakeholder	Facilities
Students	• Improve the active engagement in the learning process • Improve the grades • Identify the underperforming subject areas • Create personalized learning environments • Minimize the risk of failure
	• Provide additional learning materials according to the learning pattern • Provide reminders about the deadlines
Lecturers	• Provide the real-time feedback about the course • Identify the underperforming students at the beginning of the course and take necessary actions • Identify the subtopics where the majority of the class is underperforming and provide additional learning materials • Support to the students to continuous progress • Identify the Learning Design elements that need to redesign before reuse • Improve the quality of teaching
Higher Educational Institutes	• Support decision making • Identify students at risk • Enhance student success • Improve student recruitment policies • Determine hiring needs • Adjust course planning • Make financial decisions.

Research Design

This research focuses on improving the quality of higher education using Learning Analytic Technologies. As the context of the study, 4th-year Undergraduate Computer Science and Information Systems students of the UCSC were selected. Initially, we conducted a survey questionnaire to find out the features that undergraduate students expect from a Learning Analytics tool. There are 60 students in the special degree programs and 54 students participated in the survey. All the students agreed that the Learning Analytics tool can be used to enhance their learning activities. We asked them to select the learning activities that positively affect their exam results (grades) according to their experience. The seven most affected learning activities for exam results are given below.

1. Reading uploaded lecture notes from LMS - 96.3%
2. Doing past papers - 90.7%
3. Watching relevant YouTube videos - 88.9%
4. Participating Practical/Tutorial Classes - 81.5%
5. Attending lectures regularly and listening to the lectures carefully - 77.8%
6. Reading additional learning materials from the internet - 75.9%
7. Preparing short notes and using them - 72.2%

Then we asked to rank the features that they expect from a Learning Analytics tool. Survey results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 – Features students expect from Learning Analytic Tool

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Provide an overview of your current state of knowledge	29.6%	51.9%	18.5%		
Support to improve your grades by planning your learning activities and manage time efficiently	51.9%	42.6%	5.6%		
Graphical visualization of Time spent on online learning activities	46.3%	42.6%	11.1%		
Reminder function for deadlines (eg:- Assignment Submissions)	81.5%	16.7%	1.9%		
Suggest preferred day time for learning activities by your behavior detection	25.9%	61.1%	7.4%	5.6%	
Guides for breaks by analyzing your productivity and suggestions when it is time for a break	42.6%	40.7%	11.1%	3.7%	1.9%
Provide direct feedback about your performance after completion of Assignments	74.1%	20.4%	5.6%		
Analysis of your working progress towards learning objectives	59.3%	35.2%	5.6%		

Inform about subjects that you need to improve your performances	70.4%	24.1%	5.6%		
Inform about sub-topics within a subject that you need to improve your performances	63%	27.8%	9.3%		
Graphically visualize your activity completion inside a course (Timeline showing the current status of learning activities)	51.9%	40.7%	7.4%		
Facilitate further learning activities by recommendations such as additional learning materials	35.2%	51.9%	11.1%	1.9%	
Early detection of risk of failures	61.1%	24.1%	13%	1.9%	
Graphically visualization of your performance and progress over different periods (eg: assignment marks)	59.3%	37%	1.9%		1.9%
Evaluation of former and current grades and predictions for future grades (Performance Prediction)	46.3%	37%	9.3%	3.7%	3.7%
Analysis comparing your performance and learning activities with your peers (Performance comparison with your batch mates)	29.6%	31.5%	29.6%	7.4%	1.9%
Suggest learning partners (nearby, same knowledge, same learning pattern) for grouping and collaboration of learning activities	24.1%	38.9%	25.9%	5.6%	5.6%

Then we searched for the available Learning Analytic plugins for the moodle. We selected four Learning Analytic plugins and installed them in the Undergraduate Learning Management System. Those plugins and their functionalities are given in Table 3.

Table 3 – Learning Analytics Plugins

Learning Analytic Plugin	Features
Progress Bar	A time-management tool for students • Shows progress in activities/resources of a course • Colour coded to quickly see completed/viewed
Forum Graph	Analyze interactions in a single Forum activity and create a force-directed graph
Analytics graphs	Provides five graphs that may facilitate the identification of student profiles. Those graphs allow the lecturer to send messages to users according to their behavior inside a course. The graphs show: 1. Grades Chart - The grades distribution in a box graph to identify the differences among evaluations and students with problems. 2. Content Accesses Chart - Which users accessed many different resources. 3. A number of Active Users Chart - How many users are active at a certain time of day. 4. Assignment Submissions Chart - Which users have submitted assignments on time or late 5. Hits distribution Chart - How each user is accessing the course and its resources in each course week.
Heatmap	The Heatmap block overlays a heatmap onto a course to highlight activities with more or less activity to help teachers improve their courses.
	• Counts of visits and unique users to each activity are also shown. • The Heatmap can be toggled off when it is not needed.

Linsight – Learning Analytic Tool

For more than a decade it has been a standard for online education. But in today's world learning has transcended those boundaries and it is more than a mere collection of online learning sessions. What we need today is a flexible framework that can factor in all the different ways our students can learn while remaining open to future technologies and learning paths. So we make a platform which combines the best of both worlds: The undeniable benefits of the universal language, while being flexible enough to recognize that learning can happen anytime, anywhere, be it on a device like a smartphone, tablet, or a simulator, or an online portal like YouTube, or LinkedIn learning. This project is capable of handling all the ways students learn today and it's not just limited to an Online Learning Course. It redefines the scope of the learning system to account for all types of learning. It is all about activity streams. It describes all kinds of ongoing activities and saves the information in an archive that all devices and gadgets can talk to. This archive is known as the LRS (Learning Record Store). Linsight is an Intelligent Interactive Learning Analytic tool which gathers data from all the resources a student uses and analyzes it to provide information about the learning process. Linsight facilitates the initial layers in the Education System (Students and Lecturers). We are not considering other Learning

Analytics stakeholders like Mentors, Administrators, Faculty Decision Makers, and Educational Institutes. The system will not provide Tutoring and Mentoring facilities for students.

Stakeholders of the Linsight and facilities provided to them are given in Table 4.

Table 4 – Stakeholders of Linsight

Stakeholder	Facilities
Lecturer	• Student engagement • Student performance • Resource students use (outside LMS) • Students at risk of failure • Summary of Assignment results
	• Subjects that majority are underperforming • Learning Designs that need to revise
Students	• Access their learning data • Monitor their performance • Get feedback and recommendations from the lecturer • Predict their results based on their activity • The suggestion of additional learning materials

We used the Tin Can API to track the learning activities of the students both inside and outside the LMS. Laravel framework is used to integrate the Learning Analytic application with the moodle. The system architecture is given in Figure 1. Students need to install the browser plugin where they can permit our system to track their learning activities outside the LMS. Screen captures of the system are given in Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4. The tool is currently under the experimental level with the undergraduate students of UCSC.

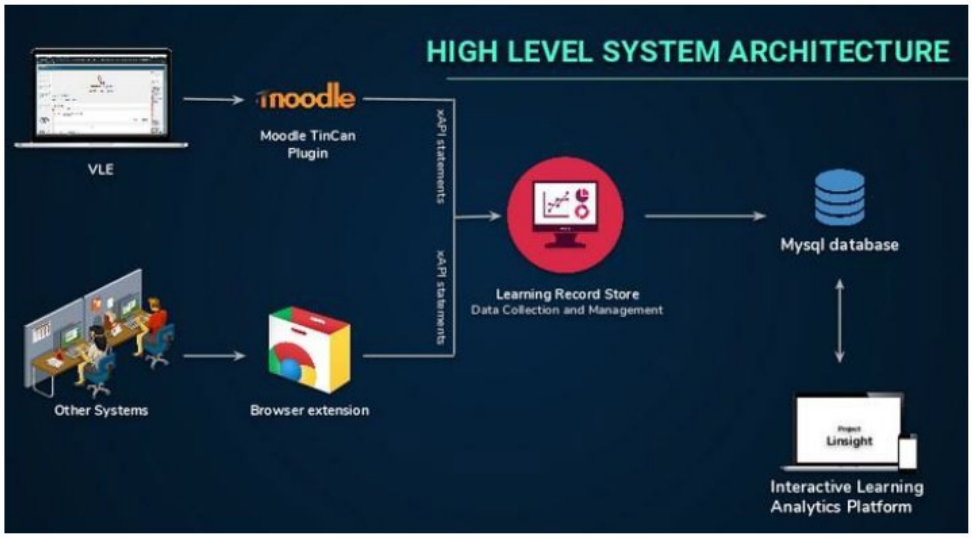

Figure 1 – High Level System Architecture of Linsight

Figure 2. Assignment Summary interface for lecturer

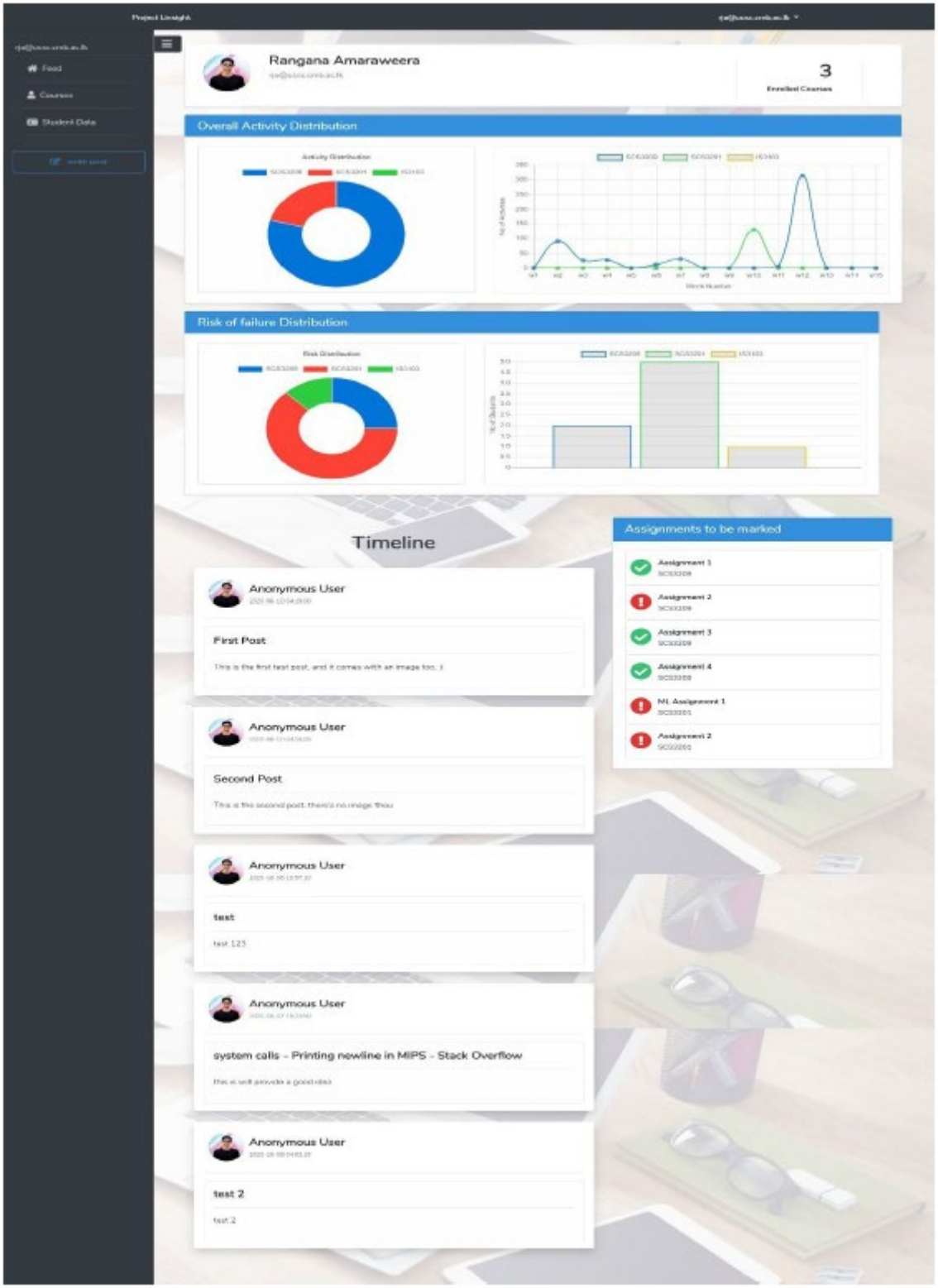

Figure 3 – Student Interface about the course enrolment

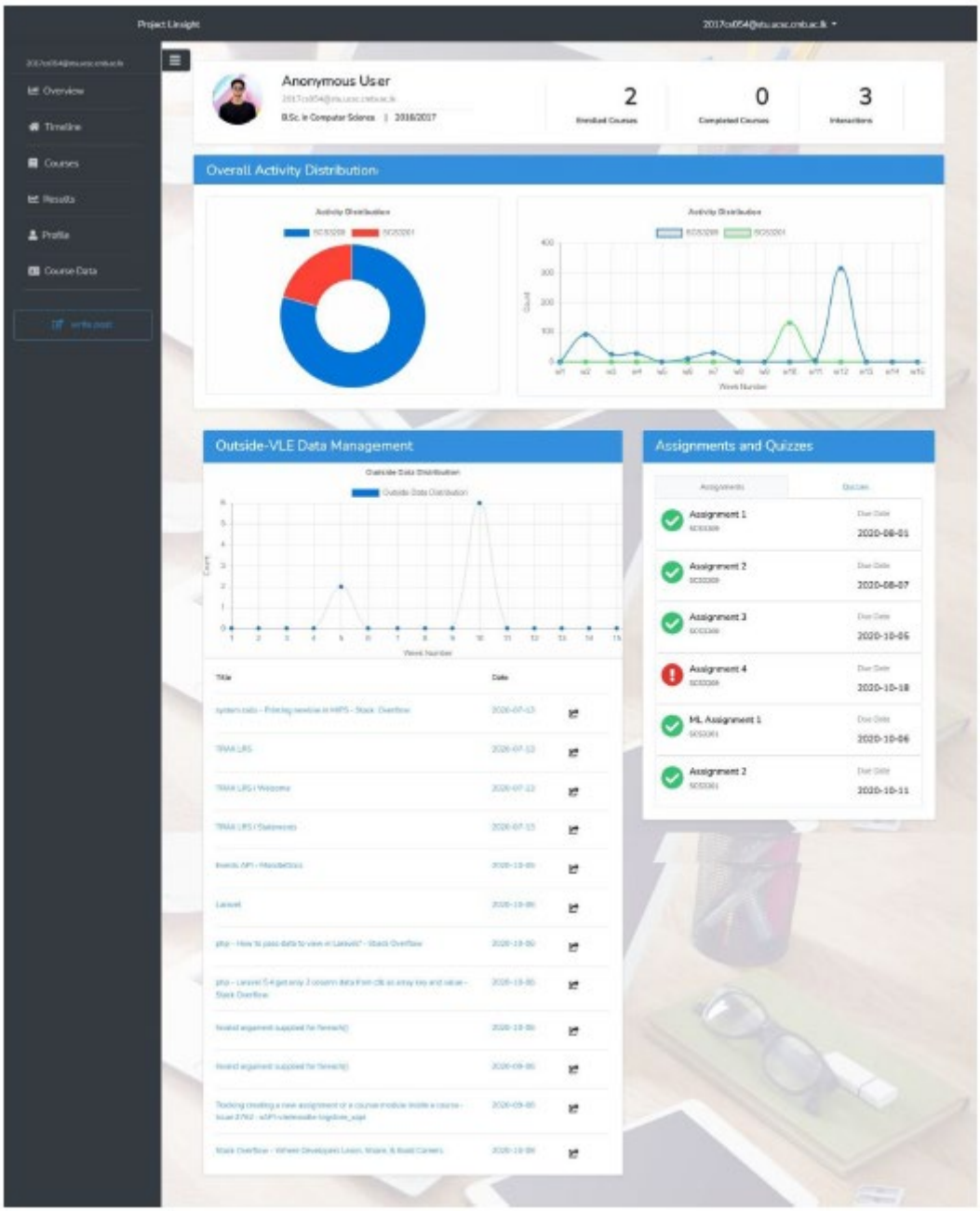

Figure 4 – Student Interface about Assignment Marks

Conclusion

Learning Analytics is an emerging technology that we can use to improve the quality of Higher Education. We have presented the working progress of an ongoing research project at the UCSC. We have identified three problems that are currently faced by Higher Educational institutes in Sri Lanka. We proposed a Learning Analytics tool to solve the problems. The tool is called Linsight which is an intelligent interactive visualization that tracks the online learning activities of students and provides feedback to both students and Lecturers. Linsight is developed and tested in the UCSC. Currently, we are doing experiments with undergraduate students to find out whether this proposed system is beneficial for both lecturers and students. We will publish our findings after completing the experiments in real-world scenarios.

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