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# Roadmap to Enabling Quality in Tertiary Education 2030

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# THEME 1. FOSTERING QUALITY OF FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHWAYS

## The Twin Challenges: Independent lifelong learning system through credit-hour accumulation and its quality assurance

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### ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on lifelong learning at the higher education level focusing on the all-time twin challenges of non-traditional education: quality and access. NIAD-QE was established to promote lifelong learning, enabling independent learners to accumulate credit hours and earn bachelor's degrees. Later it was appointed by the central government to be responsible for the third-party evaluation of Japanese HEIs. As a result, NIAD-QE has been bearing missions with opposite characteristics.

The author takes this case to examine the enduring twin challenges that can be mutually contradictory in a particular situation: how we can balance the promotion of access to higher education for lifelong learners while assuring its quality among other higher education institutions.

### Background

Ensuring citizens' opportunities for self-transformation and intellectual satisfaction by "supporting life-long learning and access to tertiary education through flexible pathways" (INQAAHE, 2022) and recognizing their learning outcomes properly are now issues that many education systems around the world are commonly responsible for. And the quality assurance to ensure the academic and social value of those non-traditional learning pathways is as essential as that of traditional higher education.

This paper outlines a system that has operated in Japan for the past 30 years to promote lifelong learning at the higher education level by awarding bachelor's degrees to those who are not matriculated college students based on their accumulation of credit hours and assessment of learning outcomes. Discussions to create such a system can date back to the 1970s when college enrollment rates rose sharply, and competition for entrance exams for admission became intensified. It had been desired to invent an alternative means of making it possible to obtain a degree at any stage of life without enrolling in a degree program. However, it took 20 long years to realize that system. It can be speculated that this delay was due to the lack of a clear source of pressure—such as lobbying organizations for independent learners—to promote lifelong learning policies. This indicates the need for more robust initiatives that perceive social demands, particularly when envisaging systems supporting life-long learning by independent citizens.

### A Twin Function: The Case of NIAD-QE

#### *Function one: the degree awarding*

With the creation of the National Institution for Academic Degrees (NIAD) in 1991, a system was initiated whereby graduates of short-cycle higher education could obtain a bachelor's degree by accumulating the additional credit hours required in an independent manner and passing a final examination. For this purpose, professors from universities nationwide were appointed to serve as examiners. At the same time, the auditing student system was revised, and a non-matriculated credit-based student system, which has been officially

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called the *Non-Degree Student System*, was introduced at universities nationwide, enabling a higher education institution to allow individuals other than matriculated students to take one or more

**Table 1. NIAD-QE Curricular Format: Health Science (Physical Therapy Major)**

<b>Total of 124 credit hours required</b>
<b>Physical Therapy Major and Minor: 62 credit hours required</b>
<b>Physical Therapy Major: 40 credit hours required</b>
<b>Physical Therapy Major Cluster A: 36 credit hours required (Basic and Research Physical Therapy and Clinical Practice of Physical Therapy must be included)</b>
Basic/Research Physical Therapy
Psychosomatic Functional Diagnosis
Clinical Physical Therapy
Physiotherapy
Activities of Daily Living
Clinical Practice of Physical Therapy
<b>Physical Therapy Major Cluster B</b>
Occupational Therapy
<b>Physical Therapy Major Cluster C</b>
Basic/Clinical Medicine
Social Welfare/Rehabilitation Theory
Well-being Science
<b>Physical Therapy Minor: 4 credit hours required*</b>
Health Science other than Physical Therapy
Human Development/Psychology
Statistics/Informatics
<b>General Education*</b>

\*A total of 24 credit hours in Minor and General Education is required.

courses to earn credit hours singly. In other words, through the scheme of degree awarding by NIAD to independent learners and the *Non-Degree Student System* combined, national, public, and private universities throughout Japan formed one large virtual university, enabling flexible learning pathways to the first academic degrees.

The degree awarding by NIAD started with 26 fields, including academic disciplines such as Literature, Engineering, Theology, Nursing, Engineering, Arts, and Physical Education. In the first round of evaluation, 3 out of 5 applicants were successfully awarded bachelor's degrees. Through two occasions of reorganizations, NIAD has become NIAD-QE. Nowadays, NIAD-QE awards more than 2,000 bachelor's degrees annually. For example, **Table 1** shows the NIAD-QE's credit hour requirement for the Bachelor of Health Science in Physical Therapy. Learners who wish to get baccalaureate degrees of Health Science in Physical Therapy are required

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to earn credits by this requirement from any legitimate higher education institution, while NIAD-QE does not provide any courses themselves.

As the number of degrees awarded increases and the population in society with NIAD-QE degrees expands, assuring the quality of these degrees has become a critical issue. At the same time, it has been the mission of NIAD-QE since its establishment to attract a larger number of applicants through its flexible operations, and ultimately to expand the population of people committed to lifelong learning.

### **Function two: quality assurance of HEI**

On the other hand, under a 2004 amendment to the School Education Law, it is now mandatory for all Japanese universities to undergo cyclic third-party evaluation (institutional accreditation) at least once every seven years. Notably, it was stipulated that this third-party evaluation must be conducted by an organization certified by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Accordingly, as one of the quasi-governmental organizations, NIAD-QE was appointed as a certified accrediting organization in 2005 (Mori, 2009). As of 2023, in Japan, five institutional accrediting organizations accredit four-year institutions have been certified by the Minister of Education. Those organizations other than NIAD-QE are the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA), the Japan Institution for Higher Education Evaluation (JIHEE), the Japan Association for College Accreditation (JACA), and the Japan Association for Quality of University Education (JAQUE). Apart from these, about ten organizations that are only responsible for professional accreditation in specific fields are certified by the Minister of Education. (Japan Network of Certified Evaluation and Accreditation Agencies, n.d.).

In terms of institutional accreditation, higher education institutions are supposed to and able to choose one accrediting organization every time for each accreditation cycle regardless of their geographical locations or profiles of the establishment. In practice, NIAD-QE has attracted most national universities due to its quasi-governmental status.

### **Issues**

For higher education administrators and faculty members, especially those who commit to non-traditional higher education, balancing quality and access must be the most familiar twin challenges. In addition to this usual concern, what complicates the entire picture is the fact that NIAD-QE assumed the functions of a quality assurance body for higher education institutions certified by the central government about ten years after its establishment. Consequently, NIAD-QE has now spent almost 20 years in a kind of dilemma of being both an access provider and a quality assurance agency.

As is mentioned in the previous section, it is now mandatory for all Japanese universities to undergo third-party evaluation at least every seven years. However, the NIAD-QE degree-awarding system has not undergone this evaluation. From a structural point of view, all universities, which are the source of credit hours earned by learners to obtain degrees from NIAD-QE, are quality assured by an accrediting body approved by the central government. The professors who are members of the evaluation panels are also the full-time academic staff of one of the quality-assured universities. Most elements of the large virtual university are already quality-assured. Only the unique procedures of the NIAD-QE –provided under governmental authority-- are not evaluated in the same way as those of traditional universities.

Under these circumstances, however, the authenticity of degrees conferred by NIAD-QE is guaranteed legally and practically: Its degrees are appropriately located in the education system in Japan, and the degree recipients are fairly treated in articulating to the upper level of education in Japan. In addition, the NIAD-QE is confident that they have taken sufficient care in quality control within their responsibility. However, there is always a question lingering, especially regarding international acceptability—should NIAD-QE be subject to the same external quality assurance as traditional universities, even if only regarding its processes? And if it should, to whom do we go to be evaluated?

Another issue to focus on is the other half of the twin challenges: expanding access to the degree-awarding system. As is mentioned earlier, completing short-cycle higher education is a prerequisite for applying for this

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degree-awarding system. This prerequisite was set "provisionally" at the start of the system by the University Council in its report to the Minister of Education to ensure the social credibility of degrees obtained through such a non-traditional mode (University Council, 1991). This "provisional" has, in reality, continued for 30 years. The current issue is whether to abolish the prerequisite and establish a system allowing learners with high school diplomas to matriculate credit hours at colleges from the first one.

Likewise, prior to the establishment of NIAD, a system whereby learners register with NIAD-QE and receive guidance on lifelong learning was recommended but has yet to be realized. A way to realize this registration system is being considered taking advantage of recent information technology, in which learners can accumulate credit hours with the NIAD-QE database prior to obtaining a degree. In this regard, studies of precedents, such as the credit bank system in Korea, are underway.

### Summary

The broader philosophy that there should be a balance between access and quality in promoting lifelong learning is frequently described. But the question is, how? After around the 1980s, access and quality have been everlasting twin challenges in higher education systems, including that of Japan. The challenges become even more complicated when these ostensibly conflicting issues are housed in a single institution. And this ouroboros structure was formed over time by central government policies.

If the policies are given, it is the responsibility of front-line administrators to reconcile this contradiction. As is mentioned earlier, robust initiatives to perceive social demands are needed to support life-long learning. Thus, we need to listen to the views in the international arena to objectify ourselves as an organization with twin challenges.

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### Preparing Hong Kong for the journey of developing micro-credentials

Dr. Christina Ng, Senior Registrar (Development), Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic & Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ), Hong Kong

#### ABSTRACT

Micro-credentials which provide flexible pathways for supporting lifelong learning have been on the rise in the global context. An analysis on the existing infra-structure with reference to the eight building blocks for developing a European approach to micro-credentials identified in the European Commission (2020) report has been conducted to identify and prioritise the key areas for the development of micro-credentials in Hong Kong. It is shown that micro-credentials can be developed under the existing qualifications framework. Considerations for development include a practical definition, guidelines for modular design and recognition, enhanced policy for credits transfer, streamlined quality assurance measures, engagement of stakeholders by means of partnership and collaboration.

#### Outline

UNESCO (2021)<sup>1</sup> proposed a generic definition of micro-credential with the intention to provide an international reference point for acceptance and recognition of micro-credentials.

A micro-credential:

- (a) is a record of focused learning achievement verifying what the learner knows, understands or can do;
- (b) includes assessment based on clearly defined standards and is awarded by a trusted provider;
- (c) has standalone value and may also contribute to or complement other micro-credentials or macro-credentials, including through recognition of prior learning;
- (d) meets the standards required by relevant quality assurance.

Micro-credentials which provide flexible pathways for supporting lifelong learning have been on the rise in the global context. They are generally expected to widen participation in higher education and to close skills gaps in the labour market.

Some common features of micro-credentials can be identified as follows:

- Short and focused contents
- Support the development of emerging skills and suit the latest development of industry / workplace needs
- Engagement of industry in the development and/or delivery
- Flexible delivery (face-to-face / online / mixed mode / work-based learning (WBL) / recognition of prior learning (RPL))
- Assessed against learning outcomes
- Component or standalone qualification

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO 2021. Draft Preliminary Report: A conversation starter: Towards a common definition of micro-credentials. UNESCO



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- Stackable and transferable
- Quality assured
- Credential with digital badge

The Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) includes qualifications in the academic, vocational and professional as well as continuing education sectors and recognition of prior learning. It allows transfer of qualifications across the sectors with the goal to encourage and facilitate lifelong learning and hence a better workforce in Hong Kong. Micro-credentials will further encourage qualifications recognition and transfer across different sectors in the HKQF.

In the process of formulating an approach to micro-credentials, it would be useful to take stock of the existing infra-structure under the HKQF in relation to micro-credentials. The European Commission (2020)<sup>2</sup> identified eight building blocks for developing a European approach to micro-credentials. The building blocks can be used as a reference framework for a preliminary review of the existing provisions in Hong Kong.

Table 1. Review of existing infra-structure related to micro-credentials under HKQF

Building Block of a European Approach to Micro-credentials	Existing infra-structure related to Micro-credentials under HKQF
i. <i>A common and transparent definition</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ All qualifications are defined by QF level and Credits with reference to Generic Level Descriptors (GLD)</li> <li>✓ Award Title Scheme (ATS) defines the award titles by QF level and credit size</li> <li>✓ Common Descriptors for Associate Degree / Higher Diploma</li> <li>? <b>A definition for micro-credentials under the HKQF</b></li> </ul>
i. <i>A defined list of critical information elements to describe micro-credentials</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>? <b>Information on credit size for micro-credentials</b></li> <li>? <b>Programme types</b></li> <li>? <b>Provider types</b></li> </ul>
i. <i>Alignment to NQFs and the EQF; defined levels, standards for describing learning outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ All qualifications are under HKQF with defined levels and credits</li> </ul>
v. <i>Quality assurance standards</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Accreditation standards of HKCAAVQ</li> <li>✓ Internal QA of self-accrediting institutions</li> <li>? <b>Designated accreditation process / procedures for micro-credentials</b></li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> European Commission 2020. The Final Report: A European Approach to Micro-Credentials. European Commission, Brussels.

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Building Block of a European Approach to Micro-credentials	Existing infra-structure related to Micro-credentials under HKQF
7. <i>Defined credits: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), defined learning outcomes and notional workload</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ HKQF credits defined as 1 credit = 10 notional learning hours for all qualifications</li> <li>✓ QF levels are defined by GLD</li> </ul>
i. <i>Portability: issuing, storage and sharing of micro-credentials</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Policy on Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) under HKQF</li> <li>? <b>stakeholders engagement</b></li> <li>? <b>academic and industry recognition</b></li> </ul>
i. <i>Platform solutions for the provision and promotion of courses leading to micro-credentials</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ QR as a qualification-based platform that lists the full range of HKQF recognised qualifications</li> <li>✓ HKCAAVQ is developing a learner-based digital credentials platform using blockchain technology</li> <li>? <b>transparent and sufficient information made available</b></li> </ul>
i. <i>Incentives to stimulate the uptake of micro-credentials</i>	<p>Support schemes under HKQF</p> <p>For operators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Accreditation Grant Scheme for Self-financing Programmes</li> <li>✓ Qualifications Register Subsidy Scheme</li> <li>✓ Accreditation Grant Scheme for Assessment Agencies</li> </ul> <p>For learners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Support Scheme for industry practitioners</li> <li>✓ Continuing Education Fund (CEF)</li> <li>? <b>More government support on policy setting, specific support scheme and promotion of micro-credentials in HK will be instrumental to the success</b></li> </ul>

Under the HKQF, one QF credit consists of 10 notional learning hours. There is no upper or lower limit of credits in a qualification. The majority of small QF credit qualifications have 1-10 QF credits (53%), whereas qualifications with 1-30 credits represent 92% of the total qualifications under 60 QF credits. The actual definition to be developed needs a wide consultation with stakeholders in Hong Kong.

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Table 2. Number of short programmes or qualifications in QR (as of 31 Jan 2022)

QF Credit Range	QF Level <sup>3</sup>						Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
1 - 10	865	956	241	82	3	2	2149
11 - 20	305	139	73	274	14	2	807
21 - 30	229	325	142	62	8	6	772
31 - 40	40	44	50	45	5	2	186
41 - 50	2	8	44	77	1	1	133
51 - 59	0	2	2	4	0	0	8
<b>Total</b>	1441	1474	552	544	31	13	4055

At policy level, the consideration is whether all short qualifications should be defined as micro-credentials in the Hong Kong context? Would credit size alone be sufficient to define micro-credential? Do we need to define the credit size? Would description of programme or qualification type be included in the definition? What are the merits of micro-credential on its own to serve its functions?

At operational level, a set of descriptors under the definition will provide guidance on the nature, content, credit size, and CAT arrangements. Considerations include:

- How to articulate between micro-credentials and the HKQF?
- How to ensure coherence of the learning outcomes and quality of programmes / qualifications recognised as micro-credentials when transferred into larger programmes / qualifications?
- Should there be additional CAT arrangements for recognition of existing micro-credentials?
- Should there be a limit for credit transfer in different types of qualification formation?
- Whether transversal skills (generic skills / soft skills) can be easily transferred from one programme or qualification to another?
- What kind of support would be needed for the engagement of industry in the provision of micro-credentials?

The key features of micro-credential are flexibility, stackability and transferability, which rely on an effective CAT system. Under HKQF, 37% (3150) of the qualifications have CAT policy in place in QR. Among them, 93% have institutional policy (CAT (I)). Around 3% (272) of qualifications have direct arrangements for credit transfer at programme level (CAT(P)).

At the present stage, CAT arrangements at programme level (CAT(P)) are developing. Concerns expressed by universities in Hong Kong include:

- Control over intake quality
- Lack of curriculum details and updates in source programmes
- Difficult to develop partnerships among institutions

<sup>3</sup> There is no qualification at QF Level 7 with indication of QF Credit within the range of 1-59.

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- Potential impact on the branding of the university
- Losing competitive edge on student enrolment
- Reluctance of programme leaders to make commitment on admission

Guidelines and tools for programme or qualification design of micro-credentials can facilitate institutions and operators in aligning their understanding in using the same language in mapping or alignment processes to establish equivalence and recognition.

Programme or qualification objective and learning outcomes of micro-credential can help employers to understand and recognise the knowledge and skills employees possess. Operators of in-house training may also need guidance on programme design and documentation to help them obtain recognition of their training programmes, especially those involved work-based learning (WBL), for learners' career development, further education and lifelong learning.

Partnerships or collaborations between operators and industries and/or professional bodies would be key to cross-recognition of micro-credentials. To ensure employers' recognition of micro-credentials in the job market, their participation in the development and delivery is crucial. Educational providers and industries can collaborate at various levels, ranging from models of co-design, co-development and co-delivery of micro-credentials.

Another form of partnership is the co-development of "common modules", e.g. transversal / generic skills / general studies modules, which will then be mutually recognised by a consortium / alliance of education institutions. Similarly, core skills within and across industries can also be jointly developed and delivered by training providers, industry associations and/or professional bodies.

Pilot projects for various models of partnerships can be considered with government support to gather and disseminate valuable experience and good practices about the potential and actual benefits of micro-credentials for all stakeholders.

Digital credentialing is the trend. The blockchain technology would enable a reliable centralised repository for learner-based data to allow individual learners to create their personalised e-portfolio of qualifications attained and to design the blueprint for their continuing education and/or vocational and professional development. Transparency of programme or qualification information, i.e. what has been credentialed, in terms of programme or qualification objective and learning outcomes, is the basis for building trust and recognition among different stakeholders. The database can serve as a platform to facilitate recognition and transfer of micro-credentials.

The existing accreditation services for collaborative programmes and online programmes are essential for the development of micro-credentials. For supporting the development of micro-credentials, the existing guidelines and tools would be enhanced based on feedback from operators.

A streamlined and facilitating accreditation model should be developed to shorten the accreditation process, allowing the possibility of offering a fast track for the accreditation of micro-credentials.

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### Short Learning Programmes: a flexible pathway to access tertiary education

Dr. Esther Huertas, Head of Quality Assurance Department, (AQU Catalunya), Spain

#### ABSTRACT

AQU Catalunya has designed and successfully implemented a methodology to carry out the ex ante accreditation of short learning programmes (SLPs) published in 2021. This is a pioneering experience, which also has the active and direct participation of universities, the professional sector, and the government in three differentiated departments: university, employment, and continuous training.

In Spain, the training for employment has been established at levels 3 to 5 in the European Qualification Framework (EQF). However, the real nature of the labor market requires in many cases lifelong learning at levels 6 or 7 of EQF. These are unexplored training levels for the Catalan Public Employment Service where, at most, managed trainings at level 4 in the EQF.

SLPs provide targeted and specialized training and are a gateway between the higher education system and the professional training system. Consequently, SLPs can be seen as a flexible learning pathway to access tertiary education.

This article will point out the strengths of the methodology designed, but also the shortcomings and weaknesses detected derived from the gained experience.

#### Outline

Society demands increasingly specific, university-level short-term training with a clear focus on employability. As such, higher education institutions are continually required to design and implement more flexible, dynamic training programmes to meet this demand. Within this context, Short Learning Programmes (SLPs) are a solution to the problem. In addition, SLPs provide guidance and training, and they serve as an excellent gateway between the education system and the occupational training system, while promoting lifelong learning.

However, in this very competitive framework where multiple actors appear beyond higher education institutions and where future students may receive a multitude of training provision, it is more necessary than ever to ensure the quality of the education delivered. Thus, external quality assurance should be a fundamental factor throughout this process, ensuring that the programme is designed to ensure the expected learning outcomes are aligned with the established qualifications framework, guaranteeing that it provides the resources and methodology for adequate learning of these outcomes by all students.

Quality assurance of micro-credentials is a topic under discussion nowadays. In the framework of the European Higher Education Area, it is agreed that the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015) constitute a comprehensive and flexible tool that can be applied to the assessment of micro-credentials (MICROBOL, 2021); secondly, ad hoc external quality procedures (such as programme accreditation) are considered too burdensome to be applied to micro-credentials (MICROBOL, 2021). In other words, the appropriate proposal for the accreditation of these SLPs would involve institutional accreditation procedures where these programmes were incorporated into the scope of the assessment.

AQU Catalunya has designed and successfully implemented a methodology to carry out the ex ante accreditation of short learning programmes (SLP) published in 2021, as the regulatory system in Spain does not allow the institutional accreditation processes of this type of education. For the moment, AQU Catalunya has assessed SLPs on the ICT field, renewable energies and automotive sector.

Three major challenges were identified:

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1. The need to devise a more scalable procedure that allows for the accreditation of programmes in a more aggregated way, avoiding the external assessment of each programme individually. There is a need to put in place institutional assessment systems, focused on the internal quality assurance system of institutions.
2. Adapting criteria and standards initially designed for highly regulated programmes and full-time students to new programmes that focus on employability and on students with a completely different profile. Two dimensions are identified with associated problems: the conditions for access to SLPs and the balance between academics and professionals.
3. The need to design systems where other higher education providers already operating on the market may also participate. Their clearly different characteristics should not prevent them from also being able to secure accreditation for their programmes according to the same quality criteria.

The experience has allowed us to reflect about the strengths and the drawbacks of the assessment of SLPs. Among the strengths it is worthwhile noting that external assessment ensures the recognition of the SLPs in higher education institutions. Moreover, it ensures the quality and improves the trust in these programmes. Due to the workload associated with the programmes external review and the short life expectancy of these 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.

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## Sub-theme 1. Fostering Quality of Flexible Learning Pathways

### One Path is a Narrow Journey

Dr. Michale S. McComis, Chief Executive Officer, Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC), USA

#### ABSTRACT

The title of the presentation is “One Path is a Narrow Journey.” For too long society has told students that the only path to success is to take the “traditional” route and to go to college to earn a baccalaureate degree. In so doing we have steered far too many students down a wrong path not suited to them as individuals or worse told students who choose a different path that they are “nontraditional” or “alternative.” In the higher education quality assessment world, we need to promote the importance of multiple opportunities and pathways for students and to help create a level playing field that equates success based on individual preferences and not on archaic notions and assumptions about what success means. Creating a quality assurance framework that promotes the importance of vocational education, trades, and work and which supports programs that design stair-step and lifelong learning opportunities is an essential component of building strong and sustainable societies and economies.

#### Outline

- I. Interactive Group Activity Icebreaker
- II. Group Presentations
- III. III. Discussion by Presenter tying group activity to the theme of the presentation
- IV. IV. Presentation of Ideas – Interactive Q/A
  - a. The Mono-Path Model
  - b. The Poly-Path Model
  - c. The Importance of Vocational Education
    - i. Understanding Student Needs
    - ii. Defining and Using Student Outcomes in the assessment model
    - iii. Creating Better Opportunities for Students
  - d. The Importance of Building Learning Pathways
    - i. Equating Student Needs to a Broader Definition of Success
    - ii. Hard Skills AND Soft Skills
- V. Group Project: Build a Conceptual Model of a Multi-Path Learning System
- VI. Group Presentations
- VII. Group Conversation and Discussion on the Themes Presented and Discovered

The hope is that quality education assessment practitioners will generate ideas about creating an assessment framework that better understands and appreciates the need for multiple pathways aligned to greater opportunities for student success. Also, the hope is to create a space for an ongoing dialogue among the INQAAHE community to continue discussing and promoting the topics related to: Designing a framework;

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### *Sub-theme 1. Fostering Quality of Flexible Learning Pathways*

writing and enforcing standards; promoting and recognizing success; and holding institutions accountable to do what they say they will do.



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### Sub-theme 2. Digitalization of teaching and learning without compromising quality

## THEME 2. DIGITALIZATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING WITHOUT COMPROMISING QUALITY

### Development of new Quality Assurance guidelines for online learning

Dr. Bryan Maguire, Director of Quality Assurance, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), Ireland

#### ABSTRACT

QQI is currently developing new statutory quality assurance (QA) guidelines for blended and online learning. This initiative will build on QQI's current [guidelines for blended learning](#) and will incorporate guidance for quality assuring programmes which are designed for fully online delivery and assessment. The development of these new guidelines for providers aims to build on the learning and lessons gained, both nationally and internationally, from the emergency pivot to online learning in response to public health restrictions imposed during the pandemic. Following an extensive research phase on national and international practice, the guidelines will be published for consultation. On completion of the consultation phase, new quality assurance guidelines for blended and online learning will be published in 2023. It is proposed to present and share the outcomes of this research, development, and consultation process at the INQAAHE 2023 Conference multi-speaker session.

#### Outline

The Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) does not distinguish between qualifications offered through online and those through face-to-face learning. QQI published QA [guidelines for blended learning](#) in 2018. These guidelines, which are applicable to all providers offering programmes leading to qualifications on the NFQ, provided a framework for quality assurance of blended learning programmes. In the context of these guidelines, blended learning is considered to be face-to-face programmes which incorporate some remote online learning via a virtual learning environment. Both blended and online learning have been offered within the state for over 20 years in both higher education and vocational education and training (VET), and public and private institutions. As is the case with other jurisdictions, the pivot to online learning was enforced on institutions and learners during the pandemic.

QQI's report on the [Impact of Covid-19 Modifications to Teaching, Learning and Assessment\(2020\)](#) highlights the critical importance of the quality assurance infrastructure within institutions in supporting the quality of online teaching, learning and assessment and ensuring academic integrity. Though the transition to online learning over the past couple of years was enforced and accelerated by Covid-19, this upward trend is continuing not just in Ireland, but worldwide. According to the World Economic Forum, the number of students seeking online learning programmes now exceeds pre-pandemic levels, and the increasing upward trend in online learning which predates the pandemic, continues to gain momentum<sup>1</sup>. The Forum notes:

- People are increasingly accessing online courses to help them to navigate today's ever changing labour market.
- Online learning platform Coursera recorded 20 million new student registrations in 2021.
- The highest rate of new learner growth online came from emerging economies.

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<sup>1</sup> [Online learning is growing globally | World Economic Forum \(weforum.org\)](#)

## Roadmap to Enabling Quality in Tertiary Education 2030

### Sub-theme 2. Digitalization of teaching and learning without compromising quality

- Online learning is an important tool helping to close the widening skills gap.

QQI sees evidence of the upward trend and momentum for online within Ireland and recognises online learning as a valuable tool in widening access and opportunities for learners in higher education. QQI also recognises the challenges for quality assuring online learning and the need to ensure we consider the lessons learned in response to the pandemic and build on these. There is an opportunity to innovate and do things differently and better, but we need to determine what constitutes 'quality' in online learning. What are the 'quality elements' in how we deliver and facilitate online learning? What do the institutions and we, as the quality assurance body, have to 'assure' in considering quality?

In initial consultations with institutions and other stakeholders, it is clear there is desire for shared understanding and common definitions. There is a need to create a common language within the quality assurance of online learning that is understood by institutions and learners, and which provides some fixed points on what institutions need to do.

The structure of QQI's new QA guidelines for blended and online learning will consider the following contexts:

- I. Organisational context
- II. Programme context
- III. Learner experience context

For each the new quality assurance guidelines will provide guidance on:

- I. Organisational context – What the organisation must have in place within their internal quality assurance system if offering blended and/or online learning programmes, such as:
  - Strategy and planning for blended/online learning
  - Infrastructure and resources (including digital)
  - Published expectations on blended/online learning
  - Learners outside Ireland
  - Collaboration and other partners
- II. Programme context – What does the organisation need to put in place for programme design, delivery, and assessment to *assure* the programmes, such as:
  - Programme outcomes
  - Learning resources, materials, and delivery mechanisms
  - Approval and programme validation process
- III. Learner experience context – What does this enable learners to do? What needs to be put in place to ensure great opportunity for learner experience is good? Such as:
  - Support available to learners
  - Equality of access and opportunity

Following a successful tender process QQI engaged the [National Institute for Digital Learning \(NIDL\) - Dublin City University](#) to lead the development of the new QA guidelines. NIDL will consult with stakeholders in Ireland and will draw on its expertise and research into national and international best practice to draft the new QA guidelines. The aim of this presentation is to share the key outcomes of this research and development process and QQI's new QA Guidelines for Online Learning with international colleagues at the conference.

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## *Sub-theme 2. Digitalization of teaching and learning without compromising quality*

### **Hybrid-Teaching in Hong Kong Higher Education Under COVID-19 Pandemic: Quality of Teaching and Learning**

ZHOU Ziwei Kyle, TAO Hongyi Christopher, YANG Yuyun, Li Zichang, FENG Ming, Organizations: Institute of Policy Studies, Lingnan University, Hong Kong & College of Education, National Chengchi University, Taiwan

#### ABSTRACT

The sudden epidemic has disrupted the traditional teaching model of higher education. Most universities in Hong Kong adjusted their teaching methods in the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. The hybrid-teaching mode was adopted during the epidemic due to interrupting the course and considering the safety factors of teachers and students. Under the hybrid-teaching model, students can either participate in class in person or online. However, there remain inadequate measures for hybrid teaching to support both students and faculty members. This study aims to analyze the educational assistance provided by Hong Kong universities, investigate the quality and challenges of hybrid-teaching, and provide recommendations on the improvement of hybrid-teaching mode.

#### **Research Background**

Higher education has been disproportionately impacted by the global spread of COVID-19, with international student mobility suffering the most due to the unprecedented health crisis (Mok et al., 2022). The influence of technology on internationalization and mobility in higher education encompasses a vast array of activities, models, and methodologies. For instance, as part of internationalization, hybrid teaching and learning is becoming increasingly significant (de Wit & Altbach, 2021). In light of the global pandemic, university may utilize hybrid instruction instead of traditional teaching to continue offering courses.

The hybrid teaching approach, a combination of online and face-to-face learning with technology tools, creates a teaching method for students to adapt to various learning situations (Linder 2017; Musdariah et al., 2021). When students experience travel restrictions due to the epidemic, hybrid teaching mode allows these affected students to continue the courses online from home country and return to campus for face-to-face classes once the situation improves. In addition, the institution can employ this model in conjunction with campus facilities to offer a variety of international academic exchanges, such as virtual conferences, guest lectures with international scholars, blended-mode seminars, online workshops, and so forth.

As the pandemic diminishes in Hong Kong, most universities were starting to adopt the hybrid teaching model to facilitate student learning in 2020 (HKU, 2020; LU, 2020). The Teaching and Learning Centre on these campuses provided a range of guidance to students and instructors to cope with the shift in lecture arrangements. In the lecture room, the teacher typically taught using a camera projection or shared screen, while also communicating with class online via the video software program to ensure that both online and on-site students could effectively participate in classroom interactions. Simultaneously, students could also speak freely and engage in class discussions through the live streaming software. The hybrid model therefore brings flexibility and alternative contingency options to the course delivery method in the event of a health crisis.

Numerous studies have been undertaken to determine the effect of hybrid learning on outcomes in higher education settings (Murdariah et al., 2021). However, there is inadequate information on faculty and student satisfaction and the quality of instruction under the context of Hong Kong higher education in post-pandemic era. This alternative approach has posed a significant issue for both teachers and students since some have argued that the institution did not provide adequate assistance during the emergency. This study aims to analyze the educational assistance provided by Hong Kong universities, investigate the quality and challenges of hybrid-teaching, and provide recommendations on the improvement of hybrid-teaching mode.

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### Research questions

1. What are students and teachers' concerns about the hybrid teaching based on their learning and teaching experience?
2. What are their expected improvements to the quality of hybrid learning?

### Methodology

This study will adopt a qualitative approach and a convenience sampling technique will be used by selecting four public universities in Hong Kong and targeting five education-related programs among these universities. Ten students and four teaching staffs will be invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews, which will be conducted for data collection. The thematic analysis method will be used to deal with the collected data. This study will also employ a study model to explore three aspects of teaching quality: learners, instructors, and learning environments.

### Implication

The purpose of this article is to investigate the challenges and quality issues of hybrid learning in Hong Kong's higher education institutions. During the implementation process, institutions may encounter a variety of problems, such as insufficient allocation of teaching resources, lack of technical training for instructors, and students' anxiety about online learning. This study hopes to provide more references or recommendations for improvement in the internal quality assurance of campuses and educational providers. Simultaneously, additional insights might be provided to stakeholders or participants on how schools have responded to the health crisis and the adoption of digital technology under pandemic.

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## *Sub-theme 2. Digitalization of teaching and learning without compromising quality*

### **The Use of Learning Analytics in HEI**

Mag.<sup>a</sup> Diane Freiberger, Managing Director, Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA), Germany

#### ABSTRACT

The presentation will discuss ways to assure quality in digital times. To begin with, it will briefly be illustrated how FIBAA's certification "Excellence in Digital Education" focuses on digitalisation of quality assurance. The presentation will address some of the learnings we have made in previously certified cases. One major topic in this context is the use of learning analytics. We have found that – while increasingly gaining attention – the use of learning analytics currently happens at very different levels of experience at Higher Education institutions. We will illustrate this by presenting some examples as well as findings from a recent FIBAA survey. In conclusion, we will show how the FIBAA certification can help universities to develop further in the digitalisation of quality assurance of which the use of learning analytics is one component.

#### Outline

The world of learning has experienced a number of disruptions in recent years: the digital transformation, the importance of future skills, newer learning formats like microcredentials... just to name a few. Graduates need to be equipped for employment roles where change will be the game. We are all challenged to provide effective learning formats to help them get there. At FIBAA, we are convinced that this route will be a longer-term journey. Quality Assurance plays a crucial role here, thus FIBAA has developed the certification "Excellence in Digital Education" – an innovative instrument to evaluate and assure quality of digital learning. The international certification is carried out in a peer review process. Representing a holistic approach, the underlying assessment guide consists of the following five standards: digitalisation strategy, staff, technology, didactic design and quality assurance. All these areas are considered equally important, however, in this presentation, we will focus on the fifth standard: quality assurance.

Examples for the quality assurance of digital teaching and learning first of all involve classic quality assurance mechanisms such as evaluation schemes, surveys, programme review cycles and quality analyses, executive's jour fixes, strategy meetings etc. However, digital education poses additional questions and challenges. To start with, a university may define particular quality goals for digital learning such as high user friendliness of a learning platform, technology or tools. Also, digitalisation offers a range of additional opportunities in quality assurance. At the moment, the use of learning analytics seems to be one phenomenon in this context.

Learning analytics can provide insights into learning (and teaching) processes as well as learning environments, so that they can be better understood and optimised. According to the FIBAA certification standards, the Higher Education institution should collect data from students in order to measure study progress, predict study performance and identify risks that jeopardise study success in good time. The steps of learning analytics include measuring, collecting, analysing and documenting the data. Universities in the certification process are expected to explain what role learning analytics play in the quality assurance of teaching. In their selfassessment report, they will describe the goals, scope and processes of data collection.

The current challenge is that there is no recognised state of the art yet and the levels of experience regarding the use of learning analytics still differ significantly. So far, the course selfassessments of the universities that went through the certification process (all from the DACHregion) show the following status. University representatives first of all mention that a common definition for learning analytics is still lacking. At the same time, the purpose of the use of learning analytics, i.e. to collect data to improve learning progress and to be able to offer more personalised academic support, seems clearer. The participating universities gained data for the following areas:

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### *Sub-theme 2. Digitalization of teaching and learning without compromising quality*

- Potential problems during the learners' study progression
- Identification of difficulties in understanding
- Information on the use / acceptancy of various study materials
- Analytics on Dropouts (identifying "students at risk")

One university reported a trial period with different phases and mentioned that transparency and acceptancy on behalf of the students were crucial. They wanted to learn more about possible fears on behalf of the students. Another university profited from the analytics that were provided by the Moodle platform for each module, following a descriptive and standardised method in order to introduce learning analytics. This describes an early stage of the work with data. In most cases, the expert panelists that have reviewed the certification cases have stated that universities are on a good track regarding their plans for the use of learning analytics. What seemed missing in some cases was a clear and comprehensible concept for the use of learning analytics. Also, more attention seems to be needed regarding the interpretation of data. While the panelists appreciated that diverse learning analytics were gathered, it was noticed that the data was not yet fully analysed to be used for the further development of the teaching. Didactical added value is only gained once the interpretation of data is used as a basis for the teacher to react upon the findings in her or his teachings. The optimisation and individualisation of learning processes can be seen as examples for a well-advanced use of learning analytics.

As Quality Assurance Agency, FIBAA needs to advance its standards in the longer term in order to keep up with trends and developments in didactics and technology. It is therefore important to stay in touch with the universities in our network. We have recently shared a survey on the use of learning analytics with universities and further education institutions in our network. Our goal is to find out more about the use of learning analytics to get a still clearer picture of the challenges and opportunities entailed. The insights will be used for the further development of our certification and may refine recommendations for action for the universities in the certification process. The intentions of the author for the presentation are to share some of the findings we have made by the survey and also address some of the questions to the audience during Q&A.

To conclude, the presentation will have underlined the many aspects that need to be considered when using learning analytics. Sharing lessons learned from the quality assurance community is important to creative effective learning journeys. FIBAA believes that quality assurance of digital education needs to be approached strategically. FIBAA's "Excellence in Digital Education" can help universities to develop further in this context, as the certification looks at learning analytics from several perspectives: strategically, pedagogically and technically. Applying institutions not only gain insights during the self-assessment process but also receive valuable suggestions for further development from an expert panel as well as the FIBAA Accreditation and Certification Committee. FIBAA has recently published the certification's assessment guide in English language as well. It will be of major interest to gain additional insights when international universities will go through the process. The benchmarking of the certification will then show how the digitalisation of quality assurance differs at other universities around the globe.

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## Sub-theme 2. Digitalization of teaching and learning without compromising quality

### Hallmarks of Success Playbooks: Enhancing Quality of digital teaching and learning

Dr. Lia Blaj-Ward, Associate Professor, School of Arts and Humanities, Nottingham Trent University, and Amrita Narang, Quality enhancement and standards specialist, QAA, UK

#### ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions are implementing digital and blended delivery approaches, drawing on the pandemic experience – but do we really know what good looks like? This interactive session introduces delegates to the QAA Hallmarks of Success playbook series. It provides a chance to hear from a UK university using the playbooks alongside a QAA colleague involved in designing the resource. The session will include an interactive activity enabling delegates to explore how the playbooks can assist them.

The playbooks, which are informed by literature and engagement with staff and students, cover:

- Assessment in digital and blended pedagogy
- Course design, approval, and management
- Student centred learning and teaching
- Supporting and empowering teaching staff

They can be used to stimulate discussion and can also be contextualised to individual institution's strategy, culture, and approach to digital education.

#### Outline

The description below outlines the structure and design of the interactive session. The session will be divided into 4 segments:

1. Introduction to the Hallmarks of Success Playbooks by AN (10 mins)
2. Interactive demonstration of how Playbooks and Playbook Sprints are being used- LB-W (10 mins)
3. Fully interactive activity with delegates (AN with support from LB-W) (20 mins)
4. Interactive discussion and wrap up – AN and LB-W (15 mins)

#### Segment 1: Introduction to the playbooks

*Overview: This part will introduce delegates to the nature of playbooks, their purpose and use for higher education providers, and their role in enhancing quality of learning and teaching.*

QAA playbooks are a forward-facing approach to designing and implementing high quality education. Playbooks are used as a quality enhancement tool in digital and blended education, based on the four key pillars characterising their nature and purpose (concept map):

- Engagement with relevant stakeholders to inform high quality digital education. This includes academic staff, and professional staff, including senior leadership
- Transformative learning experience is on-going, and takes place within education ecosystems
- Pedagogic practices, learning environments, and digital technologies should be relevant to student needs and aspirations

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- Success is incumbent upon alignment between securing standards and enhancing quality of experience for all students.

Structured as success statements, playbooks help providers identify and explore the conditions needed to achieve success, identify potential roadblocks to success and determine how they can be navigated.

The playbooks can be contextualized to suit the institution's strategy, culture and approach to hybrid learning and teaching. Their adaptable nature means they can be used as a meaningful exercise to stimulate discussion among course teams so that providers can add success factors or additional potential roadblocks that are pertinent to their own institutional settings. The playbooks can be used for planning or to review what success in teaching and learning may look like and how it can be achieved.

To demonstrate the versatility of the Playbooks, QAA Membership is currently leading Playbook Sprints with sector colleagues. These are short bursts of future-facing, interactive sessions designed for members to share knowledge, explore challenges and devise personalised action plans to enable success within their own modules, courses and institutions. By using the energy of the Sprint, QAA members are enabled to tackle an issue, consider a new approach and discuss ideas with fellow colleagues to develop and enrich their plans.

### Segment 2: Demonstration of how playbooks are to put to use- Playbook Sprints

In this segment LB-W will reflect on the benefits she gained from participating in a QAA Playbook Sprint, in terms of learning alongside fellow sector colleagues about common threads in supporting the student experience.

As well as discussing her experience of the Playbook Sprint in broader terms, she will highlight an example from her student-facing practice that the sprint enabled her to enhance, supporting one particular group of students with their digital capabilities through face to face (in person) and online sessions.

Finally, as a nod to the future, she will share her plans to use the playbooks more broadly in her role as the current chair (2022-2025) of a course accreditation scheme <https://www.baleap.org/wpcontent/uploads/2022/03/BAS-Accreditation-Hbook-v9x.pdf>.

### Segment 3: Interactive activity

We will use the time to engage delegates in using the playbooks. The overarching aim of the activity is to generate ideas followed by discussions on how quality of teaching and learning can be enhanced using the playbooks.

We will offer a problem scenario which groups will discuss and identify what the potential roadblocks are, how to overcome these, and what will be needed to implement and sustain the good practice to achieve success. For this activity, the problem statement will be presented on a big screen, and delegates will collaborate within groups, using flip chart sheets and post it notes to share their individual and group responses.

We request room seating layout to be in cabaret style, e.g. with 4-5 delegates per table. To enable interactions between delegates and presenters we request the following IT equipment and facilities

- Big projector screen
- Microphone & speakers
- Some flipchart papers and sharpie pens

The interactive discussion will demonstrate a variety of ways in which the playbooks can be used, for example:

- Facilitative tool to stimulate collaborations e.g., Sprints
- Evaluative tool to analyse ongoing practices
- Training tool for staff and student empowerment
- Reflective tool to inform future practices



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#### **Segment 4: interactive discussion and wrap up**

In the concluding segment, we will invite and respond to reflections from the interactive session. In addition to this, using a forward-facing approach, prompts will be used to stimulate interaction and idea sharing:

- to inform development of new courses and modules
- to facilitate staff CPD
- to support assessment and learning experiences

This will give an opportunity for delegates to network and collaborate with international partners who may be interested in working with us to develop a case study, or a collaborative output.

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### **Evaluation of challenges for the accreditation and oversight of Third-Party Ed-Tech Providers**

**Ms. Perliter Walters-Gilliam**, President and Principal Consultant, NBBE Consulting, USA; and **Ms. Kimberlee Moore**, Doctoral Candidate, University of Liverpool, UK

#### **Methodology**

This will be an active-learning session that will engage participants in both identifying challenges in their own contexts and proposing QAA solutions. Using a group setting, participants will be asked to consider one of many education technology arrangements and the implications for the assessment of quality. As part of that discussion, the participants will have an opportunity to

1. Evaluate the presence and quality of Ed-Tech providers in their country or institution and how that service (provider) has influenced academic quality and student success.
2. Dissect the various arrangements of ed-tech services and implications for QAA agencies.
3. Explore strategies that will facilitate the oversight and evaluation of ed-tech service providers.

#### **Novelty and Innovation of Approach**

Participants' active involvement in the session (learning process) will facilitate a more collaborative learning experience for everyone. The value of this approach rests on the participants' contribution to the content, the richness of the discourse, and the practical outputs of the session. Further, all stakeholders within the QAA system to appreciate the different perspectives of Ed-Tech and work collaboratively to identify where and how people can be developed.

### **THEME 3. QUALITY ASSURANCE OF CROSS-BORDER EDUCATION**

#### **Policy transformation in China's Transnational Higher Education: Quality Assurance and impacts**

Mr. ZHOU Ziwei Kyle, Institute of Policy Studies, Lingnan University, Hong Kong & College of Education, National Chengchi University, Taiwan

##### **ABSTRACT**

Since the beginning of transnational education in mainland China, the government has launched a variety of policies on Sino-Foreign cooperative education to meet the social development and educational reform at different phases. Transnational education in China has experienced a trajectory from early exploration to quality building, demonstrating a shift from broad and quantitative approach to more focus and qualitative characteristics. However, the rapid growth of transnational education inevitably accompanied by several quality issues. Through a review of China's transnational education policies, this paper aims to analyze how the policy shift has affected the quality of instruction offered by Sino-Foreign universities and how these institutions have responded to the policy change by sustaining or enhancing the quality of teaching.

##### **Research Background**

As the demand for higher education in China continues to rise transnational higher education adopted by the Chinese government is regarded as one of the key measures to address the impact of globalization. Since the 1990s, the transnational education in China has played a significant role in the introduction of high-quality teaching resources from abroad, the training of international talent, and the promotion of foreign academic collaborations (Huang, 2007; Mok & Han, 2016). Under the impetus of government policies, the growth of Chinese-Foreign cooperative education has facilitated emergence of various types of partnership in the level of programs, institutions, and Sino-Foreign cooperative universities.

Prior to 1995, the Chinese government restructured education system and implemented new policies to encourage exchanges and cooperation between domestic and foreign institutions, as well as enacted legislation to regulate Chinese-Foreign cooperation. Immediately thereafter, in 2003, the institutions increased the variety of partners and courses and the government loosened constraints on the policy of profitability. It was not until the beginning of 2010 that numerous collaborative projects prompted the government to enhance the implementation of external quality assurance and to strengthen quality as a concept (State Council, 2010). After 2020, the government has fostered more open educational exchanges while also regulating and constructing a more rigorous schooling system. By the end of 2020, there were more than 2,000 Sino-Foreign cooperative institutions and programs, 9 Sino-Foreign cooperative universities with legal identity, and over 600,000 registered students. Specifically, the number of students enrolling at these nine universities has increased annually during the past decade.

As indicated, the rapid growth of transnational education inevitably accompanied by several quality issues. Between 2018 and 2019, more than 200 Sino-Foreign cooperative institutions and programs were suspended by the Ministry of Education for failing assessments and inadequate educational resources (Ministry of Education, 2021). It also reflects the progressive change that characterizes the government's shift from multi-quantity guidelines to quality-controlled policy implementation. Against this context, the purpose of this study is to explore how the policy shift has influenced China's transnational education, to examine how the quality

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## Sub-theme 3. Quality assurance of cross-border education

of teaching and learning can be sustained, and to provide feasible advice and insights for improving the transnational education system of China.

### Conceptual Framework

The Incrementalism model proposed by Charles Lindblom will be used in this study (Lindblom, 1979). This model can be used to analyze the process of improving policy in order to achieve high quality policy effects, and significant policy changes result from the gradual accumulation of small changes. Based on the shift in China's transnational education policies and reform initiatives, this study will employ this model to examine the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of the effects of policies on goals, as well as an in-depth analysis of its characteristics, to investigate the issues in policy transformation.

### Method

This study will employ the case study approach and document analysis to evaluate how the transnational education policies affect the quality of Sino-Foreign education and its responses to the policy shift. The documents of three selected Sino-Foreign cooperative universities will including institutional data, school strategies, international cooperation initiatives, course rubrics, and so forth. The three universities are University of Nottingham Ningbo, Beijing Normal University - Hong Kong Baptist University United International College, and Xi'an Jiaotong - Liverpool University, established in 2004, 2005 and 2006 respectively. These three universities were the earliest to be established for transnational education and had undergone the policy transition. This study aims to explore how the policy shift in China's transnational education is affecting the quality of teaching and learning in Sino-Foreign cooperative universities, and to provide new directions as well as references for policy makers through an in-depth analysis of policies and programs. Simultaneously, it will offer new perspectives on the implementation and evaluation of policies for both education providers and participants. In combing through the previous academic studies, it is found that most of them focus on the scale and instruction of Sino-Foreign cooperative education, with little mention of the impact and analysis of the changing process of China's transnational education policy on the quality assurance. It has been challenging for transnational educational institutions to adapt to local and international teaching quality criteria. Ensuring the quality has become an essential emphasis in contemporary higher education management and maintaining the level of educational services in a context of policy change is an enormous challenge (Hou, 2014; Shams, 2017). Therefore, this study also aims to provide feasible suggestions on how to achieve the high quality of Sino-Foreign schooling policies in the new phase ahead.

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## *Sub-theme 3. Quality assurance of cross-border education*

### **Did the value of joint/dual degree programmes via virtual delivery getting lesser during the pandemic?**

Prof. Angela Yung-Chi Hou, Associate Dean, College of Education, National Chengchi University, Taiwan

#### ABSTRACT

The pandemic 2020 pressured governments, quality assurance agencies and qualification recognition bodies in Asia to respond this loop, particularly these international joint/ dual degree programs being forced to shift into a virtual mode suddenly. Therefore, the study aims at exploring the development of internal and external QA mechanism over international joint/ dual degree programs and the relevance to qualification recognition in Asian context before and during the pandemic. The policy shift over the recognition of qualification in international joint/ dual degree programs via virtual delivery in Asian nations during the pandemic is discussed next. Finally, the study will investigate the manifestations and potentials of international joint/ dual degree programs online in the post pandemic era.

#### 1. Introduction

As one of the manifestations in global times, cross-border higher education exerted external influences on higher education system reform throughout student mobility since 1990s. Yet, the pandemic 2020 disrupted the normal student mobility and forced a majority of the transnational programs to a shift into a virtual mode, including joint and double degree programs. Inevitably, most institutions adopted the concept of virtual student mobility (VSM) and expand a flexible distance provision to continue to implement internationalization under the pandemic although some institutions decided to stop student recruitment in these programs (UNESCO, 2022). In this regard, many higher education institutions were opted for taking this health crisis as an opportunity to test online pedagogy for their cross-border programs (Hou, et.al, 2022). Yet, it is often argued if virtual mobility would be able to replace physical mobility in the post pandemic era. de Wit identified following characteristics that a good quality of virtual TNHE should compose, such as a collaborative exercise of teachers and students; good use of online technology and interaction; integration of international dimensions into curriculum and the learning process” (2013, p. 2). One report by UNESCO (2022b) pointed out that “the future of student mobility will combine physical international experiences with digitally driven virtual opportunities that reach a wider range of students and build greater cross-cultural awareness and skills” (p.41). Hill (2021) also argued that “online learning is now the new normal and it provides opportunities for access that can be more firmly embedded within the TNE delivery model” (p. 118), as so to maintain the value of qualification.

#### 2. Literature review and Asian context

The rapid growth of international joint / dual degree programmes have been prominent in Asia as a response to an increasingly global job market and promotion of student mobility inter and intra the region since 2000 (Hou, 2019). Although regional data on international joint / dual degree programmes remains unavailable, Asian nations strive to enhance higher education internationalization through the partnership with foreign institutions, particularly top universities. For example, National University of Singapore and Waseda University developed a double degree programme between NUS College (National University of Singapore) and School of International Liberal Studies (Waseda University) since 2007 (National University of Singapore, 2022). City University of Hong Kong collaborated with Columbia University in developing the joint Bachelor's degree program university wide (Columbia University, 2022).

Notably, “legality and recognition of a jointly conferred qualification” in many nations are the key drawbacks of joint/ dual degree programs (Knight, 2011, 301). As Knight argued that “a robust debate on the vexing

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questions of accreditation, recognition and legitimacy of qualifications needs to take place to ensure that international collaborative programs and their awards are respected and welcomed by students, higher education institutions and employers around the world, and do not lead to undesirable unintended consequences” (p. 309). Hou (2017) also found that the widespread disruption between quality assurance and qualification recognition exists in the Asian context.

During the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020, most Asian higher education institutions, guided by national authorities, have suddenly closed campuses; postponed examinations; cancelled all large gatherings; temporarily suspended cross-border projects and programs; enforced quarantine policy on all incoming international students, etc. When these changes derived from COVID-19 forced the transnational delivery from a physical mode originally into a virtual mode with flexibility, the joint / dual degree programs which are used to be operating physically now shifted into a virtual mode becomes a matter of critical importance to the global higher education worldwide. Given the fact that Asian governments regulated the full online programs strictly prior to the pandemic, international joint / dual programs via virtual delivery was often not included into a national qualification framework as well we under external quality scrutiny. Moreover, it was found that many Asian governments do not recognize qualifications awarded by overseas institutions through distance learning, such as China, India, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, etc. Nevertheless, the issue to recognize a joint qualification via virtual delivery becomes more complex in striking a balance among national regulatory framework, quality assurance and continuation of transnational education.

### 3. Methodology

The study adopted mixed methods to perceive the Covid impact over the quality and qualification of joint and dual degree programs in Asian context, including document analysis, online survey, semi-structured interviews, and comparative approach. The study targeted the 180 selected joint and dual degree programs offered by the top 100 Asian universities listed in 2021 QS global ranking as research subjects. Based on three international experts’ review, an online survey was developed and distributed to realize the program heads and coordinators for their perceptions and attitude toward virtual TNHE and their actions to ensure quality of the joint and dual degree programs in terms of internal QA and external QA before and during COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, seven QA practitioners and researchers were interviewed to learn the Covid impact over the virtual TNHE, the feasibility of recognition of virtual qualifications.

### 4. Research aim and questions

Based on the discussion above, it is significant to perceive actual impacts on quality of learning and recognition of qualification of cross-border programs via virtual mobility and online delivery. Therefore, the study aims at exploring the development of internal and external QA mechanism over international joint/ dual degree programs and the relevance to qualification recognition in Asian context before and during the pandemic. In alignment with international and national QA standards, subsequently, the study will analyze survey results from selected joint and dual degree programs heads and coordinators. Due to policy shift and border control during the pandemic, the challenges encountered by implementation of joint and dual degree programs will be investigated. Based on the discussion above, three research questions are addressed as follows:

(1) What were the national policies, regulatory frameworks and quality assurance schemes for international joint/ dual joint degree programs in Asian nations before and under COVID-19 pandemic?

(2) How did universities ensure quality of joint/ dual degree program via virtual delivery in the Asian nations before and under COVID-19 pandemic?

(3) How was a qualification awarded by joint/ dual degree program via virtual delivery recognized in the Asian nations from a perspective of quality assurance in the post pandemic era?

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## *Sub-theme 3. Quality assurance of cross-border education*

### **Hong Kong branch campuses in Greater Bay Area: motivations, Quality Assurance, and impacts on higher education regionalization**

Hongyi (Christopher) TAO, Lingnan University, Hong Kong SAR; National Chengchi University, Taiwan

#### ABSTRACT

Given that higher education cooperation in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) was encouraged by the Chinese government, the top eight universities in Hong Kong have successively established branch campuses in GBA. Their collaborative practices and modes by the Guangdong and HK governments would be implemented to strengthen regionalization and to establish several world-class universities in GBA. However, regional disparities in the GBA are accentuated, especially between Hong Kong and Guangdong. Interestingly, it is imperative that how can HK universities can develop and integrate their branch campuses into the GBA? At the same time, how can these HE branch campuses ensure their educational quality worthy of these top-ranking home campuses from Hong Kong? Existing research tends to concentrate more on the IBCs from western countries while ignoring HK's branch campus in the Mainland. Therefore, this paper examines the motivations of this cooperative mode by local governments and Hong Kong's university branch campuses, and internal quality assurance of branch campuses, as well as their future challenges on higher education regionalization.

#### Background

Universities have not expanded their branch campuses to other cities or other countries until the 20th century. In recent years, however, the 'traditional' mobility of people (students, faculty and scholars) has been complemented by new forms of mobility via programmes (twinning, franchise, MOOCs, and virtual programmes) and a provider mobility (via branch campuses, multinational universities, and education hubs) (Knight, 2014). In China, since the National Education Commission initially issued the "Interim Provisions on Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools" on January 26, 1995, Chinese-foreign cooperative education has developed rapidly. By the end of 2020, there are 2,332 Chinese-foreign cooperative education institutions and 1230 projects, including undergraduates and above. However, due to the "one country, two system", Universities in Hong Kong are also regarded by mainland China as in possession of international characters. Currently, the quality assurance mechanism has been integrated into the framework of Chinese-foreign cooperative education between China and home countries. With the advent of concept of higher education cooperation of the Greater Bay Area (GBA) in 2015, the top eight public universities in Hong Kong have successively established branch campuses in member cities of the Greater Bay Area, such as The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Guanzhou, City University of Hong Kong, Dongguan, Beijing Normal University - Hong Kong Baptist University United International College, Hong Kong University Shenzhen, and Hong Kong Polytechnic Foshan. These collaborative practices in higher education by the Guangdong and Hong Kong governments would be implemented to strengthen regionalization and to establish several world-class universities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

HK's Branch campuses in mainland, distinct from other countries's international campus branches in mainland China, such as University of Nottingham Ningbo China or Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, not only seek for more educational resources but also improve regional integration of higher education in GBA. However, regional disparities within the GBA are accentuated, especially between Hong Kong and Mainland cities; It is interesting to know how HK universities develop and integrate their branch campuses into the GBA. At the same time, how these branch campuses in mainland China can ensure their educational quality worthy of these top ranking university brand from Hong Kong. Existing research tends to pay more attention to the



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international branch campus from the western countries, while ignoring the HK's branch campus in the Mainland

### **Purpose**

Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the the motivations for local and national nexus among Hong Kong, Guangdong and central governments and implications over higher education regionalization in Asian context. The paper mainly targets two programs of HK branch campuses programs (CUHK-SZ and UIC) in the GBA to explore internal quality assurance of the selected programs at the host campuses, as well as the challenges brought on higher education regionalization. In addition, Ziguras and McBurnie (2015) quality provision models and the FOPA Model of higher education regionalization will be applied to develop the analytical framework for this research and interpret quality assurance of higher education in GBA regionalization.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the motivations underlying the establishment of Hong Kong's branch campuses (CUHK-SZ and UIC) for mainland governments, Hong Kong government and the Universities?
2. How was the internal quality of the two selected programs, Computer Science and Technology in CUHK-SZ and Media and Communication undergraduate program in UIC assured via the QA mechanism and how did they cope with the differences from Hong Kong home campuses.
3. What challenges and impacts have brought into higher education regionalization?

### **Methodology**

The study adopts a qualitative approach to explore two Hong Kong selected programs in terms of establishment and IQA. Document analysis is a major method to gather and review the content of existing written documentation related to the study to extract information rigorously and systematically. There are two criteria for universities and their undergraduate program selections. First, the two cases were selected with the purposive sampling method, including the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen (CUHK-SZ) and Beijing Normal University - Hong Kong Baptist University United International College (UIC), based on whether they have started to recruit students by 2021. Second, the two undergraduate programs in CUHK-SZ and UIC branch campuses were selected based on the QS 2022 global subject rankings. Additionally, this study collects five different types of documents, including the official quality assurance reports and news of the branch campuses, teaching syllabus, assessment rubric, academic qualifications of lecturers, the government's policies of integration in higher education in GBA, and other relevant policy documents. This study also codes the contents of the documentation and develop different themes in the motivations, quality assurance, and impacts of HK branch campuses.

### **Expected findings**

This study is expected to clearly realize underlying motivations, QA mechanism and challenges for developing these branch campuses in the GBA regionalization. In addition to this, this paper is expected to understand the differences of quality assurance between these branch campuses in the mainland and their host universities in Hong Kong and to explore its reasons. It is assumed that due to the difference between the two systems or the challenges they face, HK's branch campuses in the Greater Bay Area are likely to accomplish their other goals (Ranking or reputations, education hub) at the expense of quality assurance in the short term.

### **Originality/Value**

The original research of Higher education regionalization in a specific context, "one country, two systems," can be beneficial to how HK branch campuse can contribute to regional development and good practices can be implicated into the QA management of IBC.

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## *Sub-theme 3. Quality assurance of cross-border education*

### **Internationalisation of quality assurance vs. quality assurance of internationalisation: a typology of quality assurance activity in an internationalised context**

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#### ABSTRACT

When it comes to discuss quality assurance in the context of international higher education there is an important distinction to draw between the 'internationalisation of quality assurance activities' and the 'quality assurance of internationalisation activities'. Albeit the two spheres of activities can and do overlap, they represent different sets of activities associated with specific features, challenges and opportunities. This paper outlines the defining characteristics of each type of activity, providing some examples, and suggesting a typology of quality assurance in an internationalised context which can help refining thinking and practice in this field, with a view to untapping the progressive potential associated with the internationalisation higher education.

#### Outline

The internationalisation of education has tremendous potential for widening access to quality education and meeting skills and training needs at global level, helping the international community meeting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 - 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' - and with it the broader range of SDGs.

But in order to be able to untap such potential it is important to identify the specific challenges and opportunities associated with securing quality education in a context of internationalisation. This presentation aims to contribute to this task suggesting that it is helpful to distinguish between the quality assurance of internationalised higher education practices and activities, and the internationalisation of quality assurance practices and activities. This distinction permits to focus on different, although intertwined, types of developments, with specific sets of issues, and dynamics. By shedding light on these differences, this paper hopes to support the international education community in shaping practices of quality assurance which are fit for the purpose of untapping the progressive potential associated with the internationalisation higher education.

#### Quality assurance of internationalisation

The quality assurance of internationalisation can refer to two distinct aspects, depending on the dimension of internationalisation we are referring to. Resorting to the distinction famously made by Jane Knight (Knight, 2004) we can talk about the quality assurance of 'international at home' and 'internationalisation abroad'.

'Internationalisation at home' is commonly associated with dynamics affecting home campus or national provision, such as the internationalisation of the student body through international student mobility, the internationalisation of the curriculum to ensure programme relevance to an internationalised student body and our increasingly globally connected and oriented societies, as well as the internationalisation of the student experience through approaches to teaching and learning which draw on an internalised student body or curricula, such as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) for example. In this regard, the quality assurance of internationalisation has to do with introducing reference points, standards or guidelines setting out best practice and expectations around issues such as safeguarding and supporting the experience of international students, and adopting practices aimed at internationalising the experience of the whole student body whilst maintaining a quality learning experience and expected standards of learning.

'Internationalisation abroad' has instead to do with programme and institutional mobility, often referred to as Transnational Education (TNE), rather than student mobility. In this case we are talking about quality

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assurance bodies having to respond to the growing export (or import) of education provision, developing quality assurance systems and reference points that allow them to provide reassurance that awarding institutions are safeguarding the quality and standards of their provision even when offered overseas. This type of quality assurance of internationalisation has two key perspectives to it, depending on whether we are looking at it from the standpoint of a sending or a hosting location, with both common and distinct challenges.

Without doubt, the most important issue for the quality assurance of TNE, either in-bound or out-bound, relates to the expectation that TNE provision should be comparable to provision offered at the home campus of the TNE awarding institution. In this context, it is important for quality assurance agencies, and qualification recognition bodies as well, to distinguish between the comparability of learning outcomes, and the comparability of the learning experience. Whilst the comparability of learning outcomes between TNE and home country provision should be regarded as an uncompromisable expectation, in the sense that providers and quality assurance bodies should be able to reassure stakeholders that standards of learning are upheld regardless of the mode or location of study, when it comes to the learning experience a strict comparability expectation can lead to unhelpful recognition challenges.

Another significant challenge, but also an opportunity, which has already been mentioned in relation to both in-bound and out-bound TNE is the importance of cooperation between sending and receiving locations of TNE. Regular information sharing, possible joint quality assurance activity, or even the possibility to rely on another quality assurance body oversight, be it from the sending or receiving location, can be crucial in helping addressing quality assurance gaps, and hence enhancing the confidence that can be placed international on TNE. Closer cross-border cooperation in quality assurance can also help in addressing unnecessary quality assurance overlaps, thus helping to reduce regulatory burden on TNE providers and operations and supporting the growth of quality TNE. Being able to rely on other agencies' oversight can also inform risk-based approaches to the quality assurance of TNE, allowing quality assurance bodies to focus their limited resources where scrutiny is more needed, such as out-bound TNE offered in locations without regulatory frameworks, or in-bound TNE from countries without a system for quality assuring exported TNE.

### Internationalisation of quality assurance

The internationalisation of quality assurance practices and activities can also refer to two distinct aspects. On the one hand, it can refer to the introduction of an international dimension into a national quality assurance system, or into the operations of a quality assurance or accreditation agency.

An example of this sort of internationalisation can be including international experts in peer-review panels to introduce an international perspective to the activities of a quality assurance body. This is considered best practice by the European Standards and Guidelines (ESGs).

The ESGs offer another example of this first type of internationalisation of quality assurance, that is the incorporation of international standards into an agency's practice. This might be more a priority in the context of coordinated internationalisation efforts, such as those underpinning the establishment of the EHEA where there is an expectation that different national higher education and quality assurance systems align to shared overarching principles and reference points (e.g. the ESGs or the Qualification Framework for the EHEA). However, the internationalisation of quality assurance frameworks is also becoming a priority beyond Europe as part of a growing awareness by part of different countries of the need to support the regionalisation and internationalisation of national education systems to support study and labour mobility.

On the other hand, the internationalisation of quality assurance can refer to a different aspect, that is offering quality assurance services internationally in countries other than the one in which a quality assurance agency or accreditation body is based. This is a common and growing phenomenon, especially for agencies offering accreditation and quality assurance services on a commercial basis. Professional bodies international accreditation services are a common and well understood example in this context, but we are also seeing a growing number of national quality assurance or accreditation bodies, initially established to offer their services to national education providers, now exporting their quality assurance activity across national borders.

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The international offering of quality assurance services, especially when offered on a commercial and voluntary basis rather than being contracted to serve national regulatory purposes, poses its own issues and challenges. Notably, it is important to make sure that providers signing up to the international service, and international stakeholders alike, clearly understand the status that the international quality assurance service confers to international education providers undertaking it. The quality assurance of international education providers also poses the question of the extent to which international quality assurance bodies can adequately understand and assess how education providers operating in different languages, or education systems, maintain a robust oversight on quality and standards.

### **Conclusions**

Quality assurance in an international context can refer to very different aspects of internationalisation, which are associated with specific challenges, issues, dynamics, and opportunities. It is important to be aware of these differences, not only to avoid possible misunderstandings, but also and specifically to inform the development of fit-for-purpose quality assurance practices capable to foster the growth of quality international education.

Summing up the considerations outlined in this paper in a schematic way, it is possible to distinguish the different dimensions of internationalisation in quality assurance along these four lines:

- *Quality assurance of 'internationalisation at home'*: referring to the quality assurance aspects related to the internationalisation of home-based education providers and provision.
- *Quality assurance of 'internationalisation abroad'*: referring to the quality assurance aspects related to education provision offered internationally.
- *Internationalisation of quality assurance practices*: referring to the integration of an international dimension into the practices and frameworks of quality assurance bodies.
- *Internationalisation of quality assurance services*: referring to the international offer of quality assurance services beyond national borders.

These different dimensions are not mutually exclusive but can and do of course overlap in different ways in different quality assurance systems and approaches. To conclude, the presentation briefly outlines an example of a quality assurance service combining and leveraging the different dimensions of internationalisation referred to in this paper, whilst aiming to address associated challenges and opportunities, the Ecctis' TNE Quality Benchmark (TNE QB) scheme.

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### **Quality Online Course Sharing for Cross-Border Online Education**

**Dr. Yaping Gao**, VP Member Services & Global Partnerships, Quality Matters (QM), USA

#### **ABSTRACT**

The need for collaboration in online education has never been greater across higher education. Institutions have come together across the USA and beyond to form course sharing consortia to meet students' just-in-time needs to continue their academic progress and successfully complete their study to graduate. How do we ensure quality learning experiences in the much-needed and rapidly growing practice of online course sharing? Can these efforts be scaled globally, creating both challenges and opportunities around access, affordability, and quality?

The presenters will 1) share a timely and impactful initiative, between a global leading QA organization and a US-based course sharing company, to develop quality standards and guidelines for online course sharing, 2) invite participants for feedback on the initial draft standards and guidelines, and 3) encourage institutions in the global community to adapt and apply the standards and guidelines for continuous improvement for digital learning even if course sharing is not currently needed or applicable.

#### **Targeted Participants**

- Senior officers responsible for enrollment, completion and student success
- Administrators or deans responsible for offering online/ hybrid courses and programs
- Academic advisors and registrars responsible for ensuring student completion
- Faculty teaching online and support staff such as instructional designer or technologists

#### **Intended Approach**

Participants will be actively engaged to discuss, individually and in groups, and contribute to the conversation session. Presenters will only need WiFi and projecting screen. Re-arrangeable tables and chairs are desirable but not required.

### THEME 4. CORE VALUES AND QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

#### Quality assurance dysfunctions, within 'integrity' INQAAHE value

Dr. Martin Boswell, Registrar, Wellington Institute of Technology and Whitireia Community Polytechnic, New Zealand

##### ABSTRACT

A longitudinal study of engagement by a case study institution with an external quality assurance (QA) process over 25 years revealed intriguing insights. Some QA recommendations were found to have recurred during the period, indicating challenges with engagement and implementation. From the recurrent recommendations, three focus areas that would challenge any higher education institution were selected for deep analysis: 1. Closing the student feedback loop; 2. Monitoring of and feedback from postgraduate students; and 3. a 'QA infrastructure' and leadership within the case-study institution. Findings resulted in the notion of "QA dysfunctions" as a way to describe challenges experienced by the institution and the quality agency. These will be outlined, together with practical suggestions that have potential transferability to other jurisdictions and other types of higher education QA processes.

##### Outline

New Zealand was one of the first adopters of the QA methodology known as academic audit and is almost unique in having continued the same approach uninterrupted down to the present day, led by INQAAHE member, the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA). The stable and consistent approach provided a valuable and unique research resource in the form of self-review reports, academic audit reports and follow-up reports from audit Cycles 1 to 5 inclusive, covering the period 1994–2019. The first discovery in the research project was 'recurrence', in which a very similar recommendation was made to the institution on more than one occasion, either consciously in consecutive audit cycles, or in non-consecutive cycles, in which auditors were not aware of their predecessors' earlier recommendations. Three sets of recurrent recommendations were selected for deep analysis and for their potential relevance to higher education in general: 1. Closing the student feedback loop; 2. Monitoring of and feedback from postgraduate students; and 3. a 'quality assurance infrastructure' and leadership in the case-study institution. The intention of the research was to illustrate engagement with a QA process in the hope of making practical and transferable improvements to QA.

The five Blanco-Ramirez and Berger (2014) quality dimensions were used as an interpretive device to analyse engagement with the academic audit process and with implementation of the recurrent recommendations. The methodology (as part of doctoral research) involved documentary analysis of audit-related reports and other institutional documents, as well as 19 interviews with experienced staff and former staff of the case study institution.

Notwithstanding overall successful engagement by the case-study institution with academic audit over 25 years, and successful application by the AQA, the study concluded that the problematic (recurrent) recommendations provided evidence of auditor and auditee dysfunction. On the auditor side of the QA ledger, a potential symptom of QA dysfunction is 'echoing', in which the panel repeats statements and claims made in the self-review report. 'Reinforcement' involves the repetition of material, augmented by perhaps a recommendation, suggestion or affirmation; this is not pernicious *per se* but may be a sign of superficiality.

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## *Sub-theme 4. Core values and quality of higher education*

'Misinterpretation' is where the quality agency mismatches evidence with sources. More concerning is 'superimposition', in which the quality agency requires extra layers of reporting or analysis to be added by the institution to an existing process, without any evidence that the extra layers will add value. 'Complexity' and 'veiled meaning' refer to the wording of recommendations and are further signs that implementation may become problematic. 'Abandonment' describes a quality agency's decision (conscious or unconscious) to give up on a recommendation that subsequently seems unsuitable and perhaps unworkable.

On the auditee side of the QA interaction, New Zealand universities put forward 'enhancement initiatives', or actions they plan to take to enhance quality. These 'good intentions' may be a signal of future problems, especially if developed shortly before a QA cycle without wide institutional buy-in. External QA practitioners need to follow up assiduously with such commitments. 'Reinterpretation' is where an institution reflects in the following QA cycle an implementation approach that downplays or misses the intention of the recommendation. 'Repackaging' is a more blatant (and presumably very rare) eventuality in which an institution presents as an enhancement initiative something it was previously recommended to undertake. 'Deferral' is where an institution reports during the next QA round that a recommendation was too difficult to implement and more time is needed. A combination of deferral and abandonment is significantly undermining to the credibility of a QA process. 'Assumed compliance' is a management fault in which a recommendation is assumed to have been implemented but has not. 'Unwitting quality' ultimately indicates a lack of quality literacy, in which management undertakes quality work but fails to present it as such.

Technical rationality, or the 'bureaucratic' dimension of quality, which references formal structures and processes, could not explain difficulties with engagement and implementation of challenging recommendations. Blanco-Ramirez and Berger (2014) were correct in observing that the other dimensions – political, symbolic, systemic and latterly collegial, help create a deeper understanding of quality. As such, the quality dimensions are indeed a useful interpretive device. The authors found that the collegial dimension is not benign, and proposed a spectrum with student-inclusive collegiality at one end and resistant collegiality at the other. Resistant collegiality, in which academics/faculty resist implementing a technical-rational mechanism, helped explain why some recommendations were difficult to implement universally. Resistant collegiality becomes more problematic if an institution espouses student-inclusive collegiality, in which, for example, feedback from students is said to be valued, yet students do not always see evidence of this. The political dimension was evident but, perhaps because of the jurisdiction, the symbolic element was manifest mostly only in academic governance. The effect of the system dimension was context-dependent; it could support or detract from quality initiatives, depending on circumstances and resources. The authors also recommend a longitudinal approach to quality and thus the addition of a sixth quality dimension. The concept of a spectrum may be applicable to dimensions other than the collegial; more research is needed.

The QA dysfunctions counterbalance claims about the maturity of the QA system but also provide some practical ideas, including: the importance of engaging panel members with deep experience of higher education; ensuring recommendations are understandable and workable; being candid about implementation challenges; not abandoning prior recommendations without explicit explanation by both parties. Factors that appear to undermine engagement with quality, and for which QA agencies and institutions need to be alert, included a hierarchical management structure; unclear academic governance; placement of the quality unit too low in the institutional structure; and the QA scope set too wide. Technology can support or hinder quality depending on how effectively and swiftly it is implemented. It seems that targeted QA cycles, a longitudinal approach and attention to detail are more likely to be effective and thus to support claims of quality maturity. There is ample scope for further scholarly and practitioner research on the QA dysfunctions.

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## *Sub-theme 4. Core values and quality of higher education*

### **Towards a new future for quality assurance in higher education in South Africa**

**Dr. Whitfield Green**, Chief Executive Officer, and **Dr. Britta Zawada**, Director, Institutional Audits, Council on Higher Education (CHE), South Africa

#### ABSTRACT

After almost 25 years of existence the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa is entering a new phase of external quality assurance, underpinned by a new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for Higher Education in South Africa, to be formally implemented in the sector from 2024. The shift is not a technical one, it is philosophical, conceptual and strategic in nature, underpinned by a strong digital approach, and it seeks to align quality assurance in higher education with an African way of being and an African way of doing, in terms of discourse and in terms of creating third spaces that enable shared responsibility, cooperation and collaboration. The digital shift will be through the development and deployment of an innovative system of Institutional Quality Dashboards (IQDs) as part of a broader Quality Assurance Management Information System (QAF-MIS). The purpose of this conversation will be firstly to present these new directions, and secondly, to gain feedback on some of the critical issues that arise from these new directions.

#### **Outline description**

After the advent of a new democratic dispensation in South Africa in 1994, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa was legislated into being through the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997) as an independent statutory body, with the primary responsibilities of quality assurance for higher education, and for advising the Minister responsible for higher education on higher education matters.

The CHE was formally established in 1998, and 2023 marks its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It also marks the point at which the CHE will conclude preparations for the introduction of a new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for Higher Education in South Africa, to be formally implemented in the sector in 2024.

The QAF represents a significant shift in how quality assurance will take place in the country. The shift is much more than a technical one, and is also philosophical, conceptual and strategic in nature, seeking to align quality assurance in higher education with an African way of being and an African way of doing. Amongst other things, this is expressed by changing the quality assurance discourse in South Africa, as well as by creating third spaces and opportunities for so-called border crossing to enable shared responsibility, cooperation and collaboration

The new QAF is underpinned by the principles of:

- Institutional Responsibility and Accountability for IQA
- Integration
- Fitness for Purpose and Fitness of Purpose
- Differentiation
- Simplification
- Collaboration
- Innovation

There is good synergy between these principles and the values of INQAAHE: inclusiveness, integrity, independence, academic freedom, collaboration and internationalization.



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In this session, the presenters will show how the CHE is growing into a new future through its new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), with a specific focus on the development and deployment of an innovative system of Institutional Quality Dashboards (IQDs) as part of a broader Quality Assurance Management Information System (QAF-MIS). The IQDs are designed to record, track and display quality assurance decisions made over time against a set of South African Higher Education Practice Standards (SA-HEPS) which are benchmarked against the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA), the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and other such frameworks. The SA-HEPS will be developed through communities of practice as codes of practice.

The IQDs will provide dynamic, up-to-date views of institutional quality in the areas that the standards focus on. An aggregation of the views across the standards is anticipated to contribute to an understanding on overall internal quality of an institution. These views on quality are intended to be used by the CHE to engage in a differentiated fashion with higher education institutions. The CHE will then be able to more effectively focus interventions, such as capacity development, on institutions that do not have fully functional internal quality management systems in place, whilst enabling functional institutions to take greater responsibility for quality assurance.

The concept for the dashboards will be shared with a view to soliciting critical feedback. Some of the controversial questions that have arisen will be raised, with a view to provoking critical discussion that may influence the further development of the IQD system.

Some of the questions are:

- What are the challenges in reducing evidence-based qualitative decisions made by peers on quality based on standards to quantitative representations in visual digital displays?
- Is performance against a selection of standards in specific areas of higher education practices sufficient to reach an understanding on the state of internal quality at institutions? And is this sufficient to allow institutions which are regarded as functional to take greater responsibility for some elements of QA typically undertaken by the CHE?
- Is there a danger of the IQD system being viewed as a ranking system by the sector, rather than as a system that enables a differentiated approach, thus further entrenching elitism and competition?

It is hoped that the session participants will raise further critical questions for the CHE to consider, and thus the session is positioned as one that enables dual learning for the presenters and the participants.

### **Aims and intentions**

- To present and discuss the new directions that quality assurance will be taking in South African higher education, and to gain input from the international community on the new direction.
- To present and discuss a digital approach to tracking quality over time based on a system of quality dashboards premised on practice standards and to gain input from the international community on the approach.

### **Approach**

A presentation shared by two presenters which will be followed by both an open Q&A from the participants to the presenters, and a structured Q&A session where the two lead discussants (presenters) will pose questions to the participants.

### **Resource**

Council on Higher Education. 2020 A Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education in South Africa. (<https://www.che.ac.za/publications/frameworks/quality-assurance-framework-qaf-higher-education-south-africa>).

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### **The relationship between national values of the society, higher education system and chosen form of independent accreditation in Kyrgyz Republic**

**Onolkan Umankulova**, Arstanbek Dzhanaliev, Mubarak Yakubova, Umankulova-Dzhanaliev-Yakubova (EdNet Kyrgyzstan)

#### ABSTRACT

We are living in a time where governments have less resources, where the economy is close to a collapse, and the educational institutions, especially public ones, are seeing their budgets strained. For the first time since the implementation of the institutional audits in Ontario, Canada, the conversations of leaders that are committed to quality, have turned to worry. Currently, when the audit notification comes to a college's inbox, overwhelming concern sets-in as colleges engage in finding the resources to compile the evidence and write a self-study report to demonstrate the processes that they practice and have embedded in their system. Colleges bare their soul to an external review that includes an auditor panel site visit, organized by the QA agencies and yet, at the end of the day, it remains unclear if colleges adopt a culture of quality or if colleges work to succeed an audit.

#### Outline

In some countries, only private institutions can apply for accreditation, because the process is costly. This practice puts in jeopardy the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion that as a society, we are fighting so hard to defend and uphold.

As agencies offering and managing quality assurance processes in a country, system, or community, should we be that selective of which students deserve quality programs? Shouldn't we aim to ensure that all programs are of the utmost quality and that they provide the intended outcomes for all students?

Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS) is an organization that serves a small number of post-secondary institutions. OCQAS oversees the self-regulatory mechanisms for the public colleges in Ontario, Canada and are responsible for the operation of the Credentials Validation Service and the College Quality Assurance Audit Process (CQAAP). OCQAS services are funded by the 24 public colleges in Ontario. Each of the colleges contributes based on the relative size of the college.

Other than an annual fee, there are no extra charges made against the colleges for the validation of programs or for the academic (institutional) audits. The colleges are responsible for their own costs of program development and for all costs associated with the development of their Self-Study Reports that are prepared for the CQAAP. Most costs associated with the academic audits (costs of the audit panels – accommodation, travel, honoraria, etc.) are paid by the OCQAS while the colleges are only responsible to pay the costs that may be associated with hosting an on-site visit for two or three days (food, materials, etc.).

Since OCQAS has the responsibility to manage the academic audits, the colleges developed a set of principles, to guide this work:

- Ensure consistency with international best practices.
- Operate as an audit which provides a review of each college's educational quality assurance processes and policies to ensure that minimum standards are met.
- Use an external, competent, mutually agreeable, objective peer-review panel.
- Follow a mandatory and clear process that identifies strengths and weaknesses, recommends improvements, and facilitates positive change.

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- Provide a method and system for appeals.
- Provide consistency of panel decisions.
- Ensure that the service be sustainable and affordable for the system as a whole and for the individual colleges in the system.

Changes to funding can greatly impact colleges, especially those located in remote and rural areas and thus, for the first time since the implementation of the academic audits in Ontario, the conversations of leaders that are committed to quality, have turned to worry. Currently, when the audit notification comes to a college's inbox, overwhelming concern sets-in as colleges engage in finding the resources to compile the evidence and write a self-study report to demonstrate the processes that they practice and have embedded in their system. Colleges bare their soul to an external review that includes an auditor panel site visit, organized by the QA agencies and yet, at the end of the day, it remains unclear if colleges adopt a culture of quality or if colleges work to succeed an audit.

OCQAS takes important measures to train auditors to see past the size of an institution and to ensure an objective examination of QA processes and mechanisms as they relate to the standards and requirements of the audit. Auditors are trained to provide equitable decisions, and not to expect equal processes from one institution to the next. However, during these tougher times, smaller institutions fear that they will not be able to adequately support the process with the human and financial resources that are required to prepare the materials for the audit. These institutions demonstrate in everyday practices that they value quality, but though the process is free, they are worried that QA is outside their reach.

The goal of this session is to engage the audience in a thoughtful conversation about the democratization of Quality Assurance. In an interactive interview-type session, participants will be able to engage with many peers to begin a discussion about equitable QA, how democratic principles influence processes, how to best prepare audit panel members, the financial impact of going through an audit and how detrimental it can be to the regular functions of a college and most importantly, about how to move forward.

With such challenges, OCQAS also worries of the long-term outcomes, will we continue to support colleges in instilling a culture of quality or are we teaching to the test?

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### **Analysis of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Practices at Canadian Publicly Funded Community Colleges: Toward Student Success**

**Dr. Hayfa Jafar**, Director Institutional Effectiveness – American University of Iraq, and **Dr. Oleg Legusov**, International Student Advisor, Seneca College, Canada

#### **ABSTRACT**

With demographics and social norms changing rapidly in Canadian society, institutions of higher education face pressure to meet the challenges associated with increased student diversity. The proposed study will explore the equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies, strategies, and practices of publicly funded Canadian community colleges. More specifically, it will examine the potential impact of such approaches on student success. The study has three main objectives: to examine how Canadian community colleges in different cultural and socioeconomic contexts conceptualize equity, diversity, and inclusion; to analyze their EDI strategies; and to identify EDI practices that contribute to student success. Institutions of higher learning are facilitating access and implementing various EDI strategies, but it is not clear how such practices enhance the well-being and success of an increasingly diverse student population. This research aims to answer this question.

#### **Community Colleges and EDI**

Most Canadian publicly funded community colleges were created in the 1960s in response to a fast-growing demand for postsecondary education and the view that Canada's well-being was increasingly dependent on the technical education of its workforce. Besides their affordability, practical programs, diversity, and flexibility, colleges increasingly contribute to research and innovation. But, despite their rapidly changing role, colleges still adhere to their traditional mission of providing education and training to diverse and under-represented groups, particularly racialized, Indigenous, and disabled students.

Canadian public colleges have a longstanding commitment to open access and equal educational opportunities for all qualified students. This commitment has traditionally been expressed in their mission statements, policies, and strategies concerning affirmative action, nondiscrimination, equal opportunity, and flexible admission. Moreover, the dramatic expansion of college access is associated with justice and social mobility.

A key function of the community college is to provide technical and vocational education to all interested students and to prepare them for an ever-changing labor market. However, equal educational opportunities do not automatically translate into equal labor market outcomes for all students. Visible-minority, female, racialized, Indigenous, and other underprivileged college graduates often have more precarious employment and higher poverty rates than their counterparts from the mainstream culture (Michalski et al., 2017). Such outcomes necessitate a new vision of the educational community. Many colleges across Canada have started implementing comprehensive EDI policies and strategies to ameliorate the prevailing institutional cultures and to help marginalized and underrepresented groups succeed.

#### **The Research Problem**

Even though the literature on this subject is growing, it is not clear how successful the various EDI initiatives are. Some researchers point out that EDI programs often amount to no more than institutional rhetoric, well-crafted mission statements, and superficial changes (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016). Moreover, higher education institutions define, understand, and respond to equity-related issues in a variety of ways (Al Shaibah, 2014). As Tamtik and Guenter (2019) highlighted, the task of supporting genuine equity and inclusion is multilayered and complex. For some institutions, EDI means increasing recruitment across diverse student, staff, and faculty groups. For others, it means providing institutional assistance through targeted programs, support services,

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and funding. Furthermore, some scholars have argued that Canadian institutions of higher learning need to move from passively articulating the value of diversity to actively demonstrating commitments to inclusivity and equity (Al Shaibah, 2014; Pidgeon, 2016). Moreover, research on EDI in higher education is largely confined to the university sector (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). It is vital, therefore, to extend such research to community colleges; with their open-door policies, large percentage of international students, and labor-market orientation, they are likely to have a more diverse student population than do universities.

In recent years, strong political, social, and economic impetus has contributed to inclusivity at the global, national, and institutional levels. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education and the Education 2030 Framework for Action emphasize inclusion and equity as foundational to quality education (UNESCO, 2015, 2020). EDI in higher education are crucial for social justice and human development alike. Even so, ensuring that each individual has an equal opportunity for educational progress and successful employment outcomes remains a challenge in many countries, including Canada. Moreover, while institutions of higher learning can improve access to all and adopt various EDI strategies, it is not clear how these practices enhance the well-being and success of an increasingly diverse student population.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to explore how colleges in different cultural and geopolitical jurisdictions across Canada view, design, and implement EDI strategies and policies. A background paper prepared for the 2020 Global Monitoring Report highlighted the need for rigorous impact studies to measure the effectiveness of various measures designed to improve student access and success (UNESCO, 2020). This study will, therefore, explore how EDI strategies, policies, and practices adopted by community colleges are linked to students' academic success and employment outcomes. Special attention will be paid to traditionally underrepresented students, such as women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, members of visible minorities or racialized groups. Two main research questions will guide the study:

- How do community colleges conceptualize and operationalized equity, diversity, and inclusion in different Canadian jurisdictions?
- Which EDI best practices are used and how do they contribute to student success?

### **Research Method and Data Sources**

The study will use a document-analysis method to investigate the approaches that community colleges across Canada take to develop equity, diversity, and inclusion policies. The development of EDI strategies is a critical but new phenomenon, and not many sources, including potential interviewees, are available at present. Document analysis is, therefore, the most potent research approach at this stage. Bowen (2009) observed that documents used in social science research provide foundational information and historical insights into the subject under investigation.

Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing, evaluating, and analyzing printed and electronic materials. Like other analytical methods, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Bowen (2009, p. 33) sums up the overall concept of document analysis as a process of "evaluating documents so that empirical knowledge is produced and understanding is developed." Documents contain text and images that have been recorded without a researcher's intervention. Thematic analysis will be applied to the data obtained. Bowen (2009) views thematic analysis as recognition of patterns within collected data. Emerging themes are identified for further analysis, which entails carefully examining, coding, and categorizing data (Bowen, 2009).

The primary source of data for the research will come from college websites, which carry official, up-to-date records of college activities. Such data include institutional mission statements, business and strategic plans, internationalization strategies, diversity policies, course outlines, policy manuals, and student handbooks. Other relevant sources, such as social media, marketing materials, and various public records, will also be examined. All these documents will be scrutinized through the lens of student success and analyzed thematically.

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According to our research timeline, we are in the final stage of data collection. The thematic analysis and report writing will be completed by April 15, 2023.

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# Roadmap to Enabling Quality in Tertiary Education 2030

## *Sub-theme 4. Core values and quality of higher education*

### **The importance and urgency of embedding education for sustainable development (UNESCO 2030) into accreditation standards and quality assurance practices**

**Dr. Scott G. Blair**, Director of Accreditation and Quality Assurance at AIAASC, USA, Vice President of CANIE-Europe (AIAASC / CANIE)

#### ABSTRACT

The standards of accreditation that shape and inform both how universities operate and what sort of learning outcomes they strive to achieve were developed long before the climate crisis and collapse of nature began forcing educators to rethink what sort of education students might actually need for life—and indeed survival—in the 21st century. And despite recent updates and revisions to accreditation standards and indicators, institutional accreditation criteria are still very much rooted in traditional measures of what constitutes a quality education—i.e., one that leads to student success and career empowerment measured in terms of market-driven employability, upward mobility, and the consumerist lifestyle. However, quality measured in such terms is neither scalable for the human population nor within the carrying capacity of planet Earth. As such, this session views accreditation through the lens of sustainability, ecoliterate learning outcomes, and planetary boundaries in an effort to change the metrics, criteria, and “good practice” that characterize accreditation today.

In the face of the global climate crisis, the very notion of what constitutes a quality education is fast changing, both in terms of institutional operations and student learning outcomes. Education for sustainable development is the new good practice in higher education and accreditation plays an important role in this process. To this end, the “greening” of the standards, processes, and outcomes of institutional accreditation and quality assurance provides colleges, universities, and business schools with the additional motivation they need to address the climate crisis head-on.

This brief session provides a research-based overview of the sensibility of the most widely-used accreditation systems to key sustainability issues. It provides innovative guidelines and practical approaches to embedding the SDGs into national and international quality assurance protocols. And it provides case-study insights into governmental efforts to rethink and redesign national accreditation processes in line with the SDGs.

#### **Aims and Intentions (Intended Learning Outcomes)**

1. Appreciate the role accreditation plays in helping HEIs become more sustainable;
2. Develop critical and comparative awareness of the “greenness” of major accrediting systems;
3. Acquire insight into what constitutes good practice and quality assurance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century;
4. Develop advocacy skills in helping Higher Education become more socially and environmentally responsible.

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### **Fostering the equity agenda in quality assurance: the development of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) indicator system in Catalonia**

Dr. José Luis Mateos-González, Senior Advisor, Internationalisation and Knowledge Generation Department, AQU Catalunya, and Dr. Anna Prades, Head of Internationalization and Knowledge Generation Department AQU Catalunya, Spain

#### ABSTRACT

The aim of this presentation is twofold. First, it briefly describes a project that has been carried out at AQU Catalunya to develop a system of indicators to measure the extent to which access and outcomes of higher education (HE) are equitable. Second, it discusses the role of external quality assurance (EQA) in fostering equity policy agendas in HE, paying special attention to the mechanisms

available to EQA practitioners in the Catalan context. To do so, it first introduces equity in HE as a policy problem, followed by a potted review of recent international developments regarding the inclusion of equity in EQA. Then, this presentation showcases the resulting catalogue of indicators and reflects upon the nature of EQA as a transformative activity.

#### Outline description of the presentation

##### **Equity in higher education: a growing policy concern**

Governments and higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly preoccupied with inequities in access, attainment, and outcomes of higher education (HE). Although not a new phenomenon, recent discourses, present in statements such as UNESCO's Roadmap to 2030 *Beyond Limits: New Ways to Reinvent Higher Education*, conceptualise Education as a 'right to be exerted along the whole life cycle [...] including [HE]' and the latter as an 'activity aimed at favouring equity and the equal distribution of opportunities' (UNESCO 2022, p.9). These narratives, which encourage policymakers to reinforce Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in HE, are deemed necessary as international evidence highlights that 'inequalities of access to the most advantageous courses of study [...] remain very deep' (Pikkety 2021, p. 176). Such inequalities can be observed in contexts like the UK (Boliver 2011), France (Bonneau et al. 2021), China (Liu 2016), or the US (Berg 2010). There is a renewed sense of urgency to address the latter, as it is believed that HE can play an important role in providing solutions to societal challenges - ranging from unemployment, political polarisation, and violent extremism - by providing access to educational 'opportunities that enhance [learners'] prospects of employment and stimulate them to be active citizens' (EHEA 2018, p.1).

The Catalan case is no different, both in terms of the existence of inequities and the political drive to address them. Regarding access, students with parents holding HE degrees have significantly higher rates of enrolment in university courses. A recent study carried out by the Vives Network, an association of Catalan-speaking universities, found that, in 2020/21, only one out of 10 enrolled students had parents or guardians without a higher education and working in low-skilled jobs (Xarxa Vives d'Universitats 2022).

Recognising this, the Catalan Government has included in its recently published "National Agreement for the Knowledge Society" (Generalitat de Catalunya 2020) the statement that there is 'the need to improve equity, so no one is excluded from entering higher education' (p.32).

##### **Re-imagining quality in HE: the inclusion of DEI**

The relevance of DEI in EQA activities in general, and in AQU Catalunya, boils down to recent developments in conceptualising the role of EQA agencies. The establishment of external quality assessment (EQA) systems was brought about by, inter alia, the need to secure quality against the backdrop of expansion of HE systems, ensure international recognition and improve public accountability (Rodríguez Espinar 2013). In this milieu, 'the quality definition predominantly used so far - fitness for purpose - explicitly addresses the intrinsic purposes of an EQA provider by evaluating performance as per the institution's stated mission' (INQAAHE 2022, p. 10). Although there are some notable exceptions in the establishment of EQA systems embedding



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equity within their assessment practices –such as the South African or Indian cases (c.f. Martin 2010)—, it is a relatively recent development that notions of quality in HE are being re-examined to include DEI dimensions. For instance, in the EHEA case, the relevant ministers stated in the Rome Communiqué (EHEA 2020) that EQA should also play a role in fostering equity agendas.

In this context, AQU Catalunya has decided to initiate a project to help HEIs in the Catalan University System (SUC) identify the extent to which their access, and the outcomes of their students are equitable. It is reasonable, governance-wise, for AQU Catalunya to do this as it holds the statutory mandate, in the Law that regulates its functions (Law 15/2015 of 21 July), to pursue the necessary activities to ‘adapt to new scenarios derived from the evolution of quality culture’, to ‘line up with [...] the needs of the sector and society as a whole’, and to actively contribute to the creation of ‘spaces of social progress’. Furthermore, AQU Catalunya is expected to ‘observe, analyse, and [participate in] debates on trends in HE’ and ‘produce statistics and indicators on HE’.

### **The EQUITA22 project: measuring equity in the SUC**

The ultimate purpose of the project described above is to allow HEIs to monitor access and outcomes of their students based on equity-relevant characteristics and facilitate change. This is particularly important considering that ‘data and knowledge on [HE] appear as a weak realm’ and that the inclusion of equity-related issues in knowledge production and dissemination is perceived as an area of improvement and a policy priority (Guadalupe 2022).

To develop this system, AQU Catalunya has established a group of experts, including academics and technical advisors from Catalan statistical agencies, to consult AQU Catalunya on the necessary indicators to provide an adequate diagnosis of access and outcomes taking into consideration the diversity of society. The group of experts has the mandate to develop a catalogue of possible and desirable indicators, considering data availability, and reflecting on the current sociodemographic dimensions to be considered in DEI in Catalonia, which are context sensitive.

At the INQAAHE 17th Biennial Conference, the AQU Catalunya team will showcase this catalogue of indicators, aiming to facilitate an international discussion on the appropriateness of the chosen indicators and to inspire other EQA providers to follow suit.

### **What can EQA do to foster equity agendas? Quality as transformation**

Finally, this presentation reflects on the role of EQA in fostering equity agendas and identifies an opportunity in the interrelated conceptualisations of quality as ‘transformation’ and ‘value added’ as put forward by Harvey and Green (1993). Widening participation agendas, and the experiences of non-traditional students throughout their studies, are perceived as being of ‘quality’ if they usher in ‘qualitative change’ (ibid.). Notwithstanding, this presentation also seeks to encourage an honest debate on the limitations of current EQA systems in Catalonia and elsewhere and foresees a limited impact if statutory mechanisms are not put in place. That being said, the authors strongly believe that EQA are a ‘particularly powerful tool for inducing change’ (Martin 2010, p.31) –particularly because they frequently are ‘an instrument for institutional self-enquiry and self-regulation’ (ibid.).

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### **Quality Assuring, but at what cost?**

Dr. Karen Belfer, Executive Director, Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS), Canada

#### ABSTRACT

We are living in a time where governments have less resources, where the economy is close to a collapse, and the educational institutions, especially public ones, are seeing their budgets strained. For the first time since the implementation of the institutional audits in Ontario, Canada, the conversations of leaders that are committed to quality, have turned to worry. Currently, when the audit notification comes to a college's inbox, overwhelming concern sets-in as colleges engage in finding the resources to compile the evidence and write a self-study report to demonstrate the processes that they practice and have embedded in their system. Colleges bare their soul to an external review that includes an auditor panel site visit, organized by the QA agencies and yet, at the end of the day, it remains unclear if colleges adopt a culture of quality or if colleges work to succeed an audit.

#### Outline

In some countries, only private institutions can apply for accreditation, because the process is costly. This practice puts in jeopardy the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion that as a society, we are fighting so hard to defend and uphold.

As agencies offering and managing quality assurance processes in a country, system, or community, should we be that selective of which students deserve quality programs? Shouldn't we aim to ensure that all programs are of the utmost quality and that they provide the intended outcomes for all students?

Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS) is an organization that serves a small number of post-secondary institutions. OCQAS oversees the self-regulatory mechanisms for the public colleges in Ontario, Canada and are responsible for the operation of the Credentials Validation Service and the College Quality Assurance Audit Process (CQAAP). OCQAS services are funded by the 24 public colleges in Ontario. Each of the colleges contributes based on the relative size of the college.

Other than an annual fee, there are no extra charges made against the colleges for the validation of programs or for the academic (institutional) audits. The colleges are responsible for their own costs of program development and for all costs associated with the development of their Self-Study Reports that are prepared for the CQAAP. Most costs associated with the academic audits (costs of the audit panels - accommodation, travel, honoraria, etc.) are paid by the OCQAS while the colleges are only responsible to pay the costs that may be associated with hosting an on-site visit for two or three days (food, materials, etc.).

Since OCQAS has the responsibility to manage the academic audits, the colleges developed a set of principles, to guide this work:

- Ensure consistency with international best practices.
- Operate as an audit which provides a review of each college's educational quality assurance processes and policies to ensure that minimum standards are met.
- Use an external, competent, mutually agreeable, objective peer-review panel.
- Follow a mandatory and clear process that identifies strengths and weaknesses, recommends improvements, and facilitates positive change.
- Provide a method and system for appeals.
- Provide consistency of panel decisions.

# Roadmap to Enabling Quality in Tertiary Education 2030

## *Sub-theme 4. Core values and quality of higher education*

- Ensure that the service be sustainable and affordable for the system as a whole and for the individual colleges in the system.

Changes to funding can greatly impact colleges, especially those located in remote and rural areas and thus, for the first time since the implementation of the academic audits in Ontario, the conversations of leaders that are committed to quality, have turned to worry. Currently, when the audit notification comes to a college's inbox, overwhelming concern sets-in as colleges engage in finding the resources to compile the evidence and write a self-study report to demonstrate the processes that they practice and have embedded in their system. Colleges bare their soul to an external review that includes an auditor panel site visit, organized by the QA agencies and yet, at the end of the day, it remains unclear if colleges adopt a culture of quality or if colleges work to succeed an audit.

OCQAS takes important measures to train auditors to see past the size of an institution and to ensure an objective examination of QA processes and mechanisms as they relate to the standards and requirements of the audit. Auditors are trained to provide equitable decisions, and not to expect equal processes from one institution to the next. However, during these tougher times, smaller institutions fear that they will not be able to adequately support the process with the human and financial resources that are required to prepare the materials for the audit. These institutions demonstrate in everyday practices that they value quality, but though the process is free, they are worried that QA is outside their reach.

The goal of this session is to engage the audience in a thoughtful conversation about the democratization of Quality Assurance. In an interactive interview-type session, participants will be able to engage with many peers to begin a discussion about equitable QA, how democratic principles influence processes, how to best prepare audit panel members, the financial impact of going through an audit and how detrimental it can be to the regular functions of a college and most importantly, about how to move forward.

With such challenges, OCQAS also worries of the long-term outcomes, will we continue to support colleges in instilling a culture of quality or are we teaching to the test?

# Roadmap to Enabling Quality in Tertiary Education 2030

## *Sub-theme 4. Core values and quality of higher education*

### **Academic Integrity and ENQA quality assurance agencies: where do we stand and where are we headed?**

**Drs. Yvonne Overdeest**, Senior Policy Advisor NVAO, Netherlands, and member of ENQA's working group on academic integrity, and **Ms. Sue Hackett**, QQI, Ireland, and Chair of ENQA's working group on academic integrity

#### ABSTRACT

Integrity. An indisputable ethical code of academia and core INQAAHE value.

ENQA established a working group to research the role of QA agencies in supporting academic integrity and combatting fraud in higher education. The completed work resulted in thought-provoking findings and aimed to provide concrete guidance to agencies in order to help them take forward their work on this topic. A set of commonly agreed terminology and definitions was an area identified in the findings of the survey, and addressed in the ensuing WG report.

Join Sue Hackett and Yvonne Overdeest, QA professionals passionate about academic integrity, for a stimulating conversation session. A presentation about ENQA's working group on academic integrity exploring the picture across Europe on the basis of a survey to ENQA members and affiliates will be followed by discussion. Participants will exchange perceptions and reflections on the roles of stakeholders with regard to academic integrity.

#### **Conversation session, brief presentation followed by discussion**

To what extent are quality assurance agencies and (higher) education providers working to inform students, staff and other stakeholders about the risks posed by academic misconduct? We all acknowledge the need to maintain cultures of academic integrity but to what extent are QA agencies involved in this? To what degree can QA agencies, HEI's and authorities collaborate to collect data, determine policy, discourage academic misconduct, and disrupt business models based on academic misconduct? How even do we define academic integrity?

These questions guided the research of the ENQA working group on academic integrity (2021-2023).

Participants' takeaways of this session examining the WG findings? Sharing knowledge and insights with peers, and meeting potential partners and collaborators. Academic integrity is a difficult, sometimes confronting, often overwhelming, topic, but always rewarding and certainly effective when we stand united.

#### **Target audience**

- Representatives of government bodies such as inspectorates
- Representatives of higher education institutions.
- Quality assurance and accreditation agencies and related organisations.
- Councils for university education.

#### **Main objectives and/or intended learning outcomes of the conversation session**

##### Main objectives

- To enhance (cross border) peer conversations between QA agencies, HEI's, and authorities because an effective approach to discouraging academic misconduct and encouraging ethical behaviour best takes place within the agency / HEI / national authorities triad.

# Roadmap to Enabling Quality in Tertiary Education 2030

## *Sub-theme 4. Core values and quality of higher education*

- Disseminate the results and findings of the research intended to examine where diverse QA agencies, with varying levels of maturity, stand with regard to academic integrity.
- Exchange ideas with QA agencies, HEI's, and authorities about what is happening in their contexts and what they would like to see happening.

Intended outcomes for participants:

- Discuss the value of a set of commonly agreed terminology and definitions.
- Engage in peer conversations.
- Reflect and assess the findings in the ENQA survey with regard to their own context.
- Exchange insights and practices in their own contexts.
- Learn what is happening on a global scale with regard to threats to academic integrity.
- Meet peers interested in the same issues with the prospect of further (cross-border) collaboration.

### **Activities to be carried out**

The conversation session is divided into a plenary part of about 15 minutes in which the facilitators give an interactive presentation. The second part consists of a group activity in which participants reflect on the findings of the ENQA working group Academic Integrity and exchange perspectives and experiences from their own contexts (25 minutes). These perspectives and experiences will be written up on an anonymised digital platform (Padlet), so that afterwards, if so desired, participants can revisit the outcomes of the other discussion groups.

The session ends with a plenary wrap up and reflection (15 minutes). For the group activity, the participants will work in small groups no larger than 4/5 people, ensuring a diverse representation in each group (university councils, national authorities, QA, HEI'S divided over different countries). The NVAO presenters will facilitate and offer assistance and guidance where necessary.

### Summarised:

1. The first activity is a short presentation on the completed work and findings of the ENQA working group Academic Integrity.
2. The interactive component: each group will discuss the current challenges to academic integrity from their perspectives, in their national/regional context and the perceived value of a set of commonly agreed terminology and definitions and/or policies at a national level.
3. The third part is the plenary wrap up and reflection. During this session the groups present their main "findings" and critical observations to the other participants.



**INQAAHE**

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