Making sense of Diversity

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Change & Diversity

Change & Innovation – popular topic 30 years ago
- ‘The more things change the more they stay the same’.
- ‘Change is the only constant’.

Applying to Diversity
- ‘Diversity is the only common aspect of HEIs.’

Magnitude of Diversity

- Dealing with new forms of learning and new types of providers is not new to us (eg expanding the scope to include DE and TNE)
- What is new is the magnitude of change and the exponential growth of new type of providers.

Irrespective of

- Resource base available – eg. Public expenditure on education
- Size of the HE systems (38000 HEIs Vs ten HEIs)
- HE tradition (ten years vs a century old)

Realistic expectations?

- What is the starting point of an EQA's approach to diversity – eg. direct diversity and eliminate unwanted deviations (to keep the cow boys away) or recognise and facilitate diversity?

- Within the remit of the given objectives, well responsive EQAs have been successful in managing diversity.

- Success stories of the EQAs I have been closely associated with in the past – including NAAC (India), AUQA (Australia), CAA (UAE). Some examples from the US and the Small States.

Some success stories – Australia

Australian Universities Quality Agency (2001-2011) applied its audit model to universities of very different characters.

- University X that had thousands of TNE students in its post graduate programs spread in different continents
- University Y that had more domestic distance education students than on-campus students
- HEI Z that had less than fifty students in its specialized postgraduate programs in media and communication
- all were audited using the same QA model.

Some success stories – India

- National Assessment and Accreditation Council applies its assessment and accreditation model successfully on a diverse HE sector.
- Large HE sector that consists of around 700 universities and 37,000 colleges.
- Types of institutions include Central Universities, State Universities, State Private universities, Deemed to be Universities, Institutes of National Importance, affiliated colleges and autonomous colleges.
- Various levels of distance education, online courses and TNE for a variety of reasons.

Some success stories – UAE

Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA)

- University X which is a e-university with physical presence but a small operation
- University Y which is a big provider with many branch campuses and thousands of students with a significant proportion coming from other countries
- University Z which primarily caters to national students and offers only programs that are of national priority and funded well

UAE (Contd)

- Colleges and specialised institutes such as the Petroleum Institute, Emirates Aviation College, Emirates Institute for Banking and Financial Services
- Co-existence of philanthropic & commercial initiatives
- International & national initiatives

– all undergo the same rigorous process of CAA.

Some success stories – East Timor

- First round of QA reviews when the country was marking its ten years of independence
- First independent country of the 21st century
- A very young HE sector consisting of 14 HEIs.
- University X that had a few hundred students and many programs
- Coffee Academy that specialized in one program related to coffee growing
- A business college with two programs

– all were reviewed following the same QA framework.

Some Success Stories: The US

▶ Over decades the accreditors have adapted various approaches to their work. Allowing flexibility in the scope of assessment and the approach to self study, multi-stage assessment, varying period of validity for the assessment outcome, development project models, guidelines to review new forms of learning – are a few successful steps the regional accreditors have implemented with their collaborators.

What do these success stories indicate?

Successful Approaches

Optimization of traditional methods to maximize their value

The successful approaches have embraced the following:
- ▸ beyond simple tolerance for differences
- ▸ respect for the rich dimensions of variations
- ▸ partnership with HE providers
- ▸ appropriate contextualisation

Contextualisation

▸ central role of peers
▸ willingness of QA professionals to experiment
▸ strong voice of the HE providers
▸ flexibility to contextualize the QA framework
▸ adequate support structure for guiding contextualisation and collective decision
▸ Attention to relevance and robustness of the QA framework

Strengthening Contextualization

Support the peers in taking well informed collective decisions in specific contexts.

Some examples:

- Weightages and pointers used by NAAC
- Worksheets and HE statistics provided by AUQA
- CHEDS data support for the CAA reviews
- Involvement of stakeholders from outside the HE sector
- Preparatory workshops for review panels

Attention to Relevance

- Fine-tuning the QA framework
  - Eg. AUQA's Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 audits, NAAC's Cycle 2, multiple cycles with different focus in NZ, revision of Standards in the UAE
- External feedback
- Involvement of other stakeholders

Beyond contextualization

▸ Various open forms of learning – the most persistent and controversial

▸ MOOCs and OERs

▸ Who is responsible for which aspect of 'learning resources–learner assessment–certification–recognition' ?

Open forms of learning

- Several new initiatives in recent years and a lot of progress
- Millions of dollars and staff time on projects
- UNESCO and COL have taken a lead
- American Council of Education is trialing projects on finding a viable pathway for accreditation of MOOC learning
- Networks of institutions and foundations have emerged such as the OER*universitas* and OER Foundation
- Distance education interest groups and peak bodies are redefining their guidelines to include open learning forms

Involvement of EQAs

- How well informed and involved are the QA agencies in these developments?
- Highly variable, often inadequate
- This is an area where INQAAHE can collaborate with the innovators in developing/identifying QA good practices and disseminate them

- Not much time left to catch up with the changes.
- For example, in the year 2013 when a MOOC provider started its operation, the total registration for that first year of operation was close to three million. Last year more initiatives have been introduced and this trend is likely to continue.

Towards Solutions

- The concept of 'disaggregation of teaching and assessment' has become acceptable now. Based on Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer principles, new options are being considered to apply to open forms of learning.
- But scalability of any model, economic challenges it will bring to students and governance challenges for the HE providers remain to be solved.
- Open learning interest groups have expressed concerns about the role of quality assurance bodies. EQAs need to collaborate with the HE providers.

Towards solutions

Any solution needs to be

- ▸ acceptable internationally across national borders due to increasing academic and professional mobility
- ▸ valued by stakeholders including HE providers, learners, employers and the government
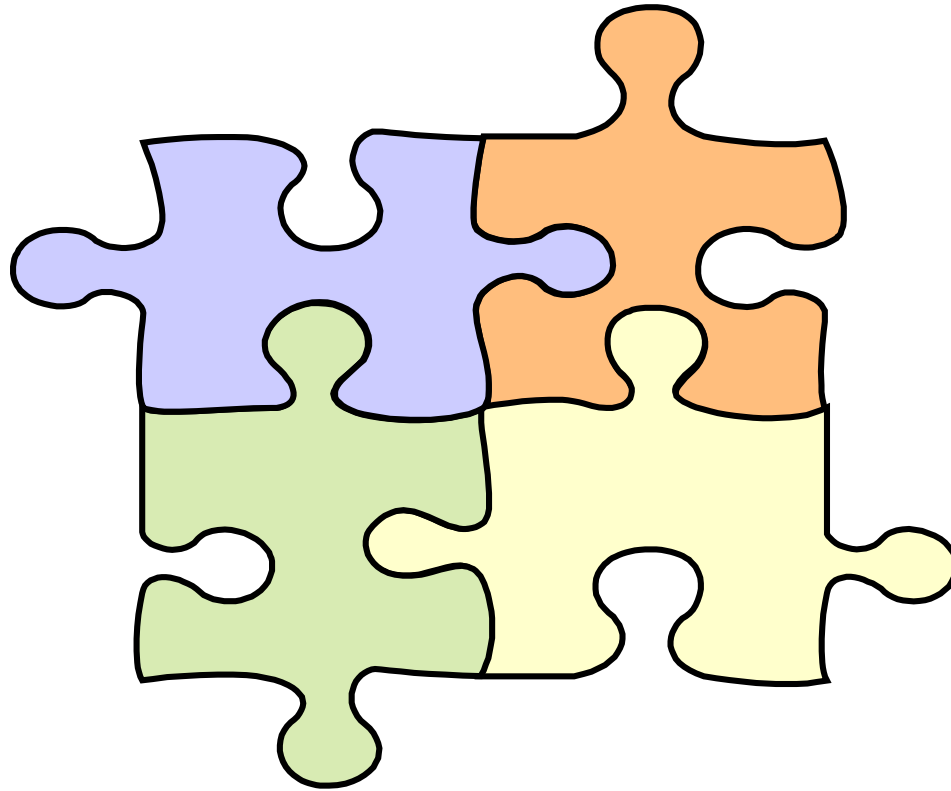
Towards solutions

- EQAs need to develop into learning organisations
- They need to adapt to the changes they find in their contexts without compromising their core purposes
- In open forms of learning, they need to strengthen their partnership with HEIs and other stakeholders

To conclude

- QAs have always been dealing with the diversity of their HE sectors
- A key approach they follow is 'contextualisation'
- There are many success stories of strengthening contextualization without compromising the rigor of QA

To Conclude

- Some open forms of learning require QA agencies to move beyond contextualization
- EQAs need to develop into learning organisations and explore their role in open forms of learning

- HEIs and their networks have made some progress in considering solutions for the challenges of open forms of learning
- I see an important role for INQAAHE in this

Thank you