

Session 2-4

Quality Information Systems as Response to Rankings-An Innovative Strategy of Asia Pacific Quality Network

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Abstract

This paper advocates setting up of robust Quality Information systems at institutional , national and international level in the wake of growing clout of rankings . Findings in the paper are based on the project of Asia Pacific Quality Network supported by UNESCO GIQAC.

Gaps and disparities exist in different parts of world in terms of quality information. There are well-established national and regional systems and networks in Europe and north America. While we find relatively unorganised systems in other part of world with some exceptions like Australia and Japan. This gap is supposedly being filled by so called national and global Rankings. UNESCO Portal on Higher Education Institutions offers access to on-line information on higher education institutions recognized or otherwise. It provides students, employers and other interested parties with access to authoritative and up-to-date information on the status of higher education institutions and quality assurance in participating countries . The problem is that a very few countries have joined this vital initiative of sharing authentic information on higher education. Situation in Asia Pacific is more critical as only 7 countries have joined this initiative.

This Project aimed to map practices of Quality Assurance Agencies and other bodies in spreading quality information among stakeholders in general and students in particular. It also tried to map as to how UNESCO Portal on higher education is being received by QAAs in APQN region. Main objective is to promote this initiative among QA community by providing a toolkit based on mapping of good practices and useful templates.

As a result of the survey and analysis, the project group recommended setting up Asia-Pacific Educational Quality Information Portal- APEQUIP on lines of ENIC NARIC. Study on various international information networks has provided a way for the toolkit development. It is argued that if QA Network succeeds in setting up Quality information systems in the region, it will not only provide good alternative to Rankings but also it will be an unique service to students and other stakeholders across Asia Pacific as well as globally.

Context of Student mobility, QA and Rankings

Student Mobility is on rise both at national and regional level. More than 2.5 million students are studying outside their home countries. Figure is estimated to rise to 7 million international students by 2020. [Altbach, 2009]

Many underlying trends exist . The major one is about students from Asia moving to North America, Western Europe, and Australia, etc. Quality information is vital for student mobility . Gaps and disparities exist in different parts of world in terms of quality information. There are well-established national and regional systems and networks in Europe and north America. While we find relatively unorganised systems in other part of world with some exceptions like Australia, Japan,etc.

This gap is supposedly being filled by so called national and global Rankings

The main claim of rankings is to provide interpretable information about the institutions to different stake holders . Some experts say that , “Rankings do have positive effects. They can help students select courses, department heads choose new research partners and university managers benchmark performance internationally and set strategic priorities” (Baty, 2010).

Williams suggests that the Times ranking extends the range of attributes beyond research performance. It includes the qualitative views of peers, quantitative measures of citations, ratio of students to academic staff and internationalisation of both students and faculty.(Williams & Dyke .,2007).

Leading expert in higher education Salmi says , ‘League tables , also referred to as institutional rankings and report cards [...], are constructed by using objective and/or subjective data obtained from institutions or from the public domain, resulting in a “quality measure” assigned to the unit of comparison relative to its competitors. Salmi & Saroyan (2007)

Some of the Ranking bodies also claim that rankings can also serve as part of a framework for national assessment, accountability and quality assurance in the higher education system and arguably can provide some of the rationale for allocation of funds.

..... ‘The results of the first *Times Higher Education [World Reputation Rankings](#)* shed light on this increasingly important measure. drawn from a survey of more than 13,000 experienced academics worldwide , but are now published in isolation for the first time, revealing clear discrepancies between some institutions' reputations and their overall ranking’ .(Morgan,J.2011)

The critiques have time and again pointed out serious lacunas with rankings regarding methodology, reliability and even challenged motives of some rankings.

THES rating system appears to show unacceptable year to year variances, they are not likely to be a useful component of any rational approach to academic management. (Bookstein et. al., 2010)

Harvey (2008) stresses that, 'rankings provide a real threat to quality processes. The simplistic measurement..... league tables appear to have more popular appeal and even credibility....., than the meticulous hard work of quality agencies.'

In fact these concerns are more acute in developing countries like India where Access and equity are equally important as quality. Onslaught of rankings backed by powerful media are causing confusions among stakeholders. While the QA is still voluntary, the HEIs have found easy option of obtaining quality tag by opting to media rankings. (Patil, 2010)

'the challenge is to ensure that global rankings are effectively displaced by alternative instruments that serve important educational and social purposes,'[Saleem]

Student body in Europe has called (ESU, 2008) for information systems to be set up that acknowledge 'the diversity and multiple purposes..and 'can become a useful tool for student choice'.

Salmi writes "There is no universal recipe or magic formula for 'making' a world-class university. National contexts and institutional models vary widely. Therefore, each country must choose, from among the various possible pathways, a strategy that plays to its strengths and resources.

All these academic debates leads to believe that there is increasing tension about relevance and utility of QA process in the wake of rankings in various forms. Author of this paper has argued on many platforms including INQAAHE (Patil, 2011) and APQN, that QA bodies need to respond to this concern by setting up quality information systems so that stakeholders get benefited from quality information.

UNESCO portal on higher education and other initiatives.

UNESCO Portal on Higher Education Institutions offers access to on-line information on higher education institutions recognized or otherwise.It provides students, employers and other interested parties with access to authoritative and up-to-date information on the status of higher education institutions and quality assurance in participating countries .

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About the QIS Project of APQN

With this backdrop APQN decided to embark on Quality Information Systems Project

UNESCO GIQAC approved Project Proposal of APQN on Toolkit for Quality Information system (QIS) with Dr Jagannath Patil as Principal investigator.

This Project aims to -

- Map practices of Quality Assurance Agencies and other bodies in spreading quality information among stakeholders in general and students in particular.
- Tries to map as to how UNESCO Portal on higher education is being received by QAAs in APQN region.
- Promote this initiative among QA community by providing a toolkit based on mapping of good practices and useful templates such as UNESCO Portal.

APQN conducted a preliminary workshop to identify good practices in the APQN annual conference held in **1 March**, 2012, Siem Reap Angkor, Kingdom of Cambodia.

The participants were invited to share policies and practices in respective QAAs and / or HEIs in terms of spreading quality information such as accreditation status of institutions and programmes. The workshop was lead by APQN president, Dr. Jagannath Patil, with Vice President, Prof. Angela Yung Chi Hou as co-facilitator

APQN conducted a survey targeting all APQN members including full, intermediate, institutional and observer types, for their views on the QA information in regards to the developing QIS system. Data compilation and analyses was greatly supported by Chung lin Chiang, Darren Lin, Yung Yung Chang and DJ Savitha. Survey was followed up by Fang Le.

Key Findings of survey are as below :

1. Growing awareness of QA information transparency but lack of coordination at national and regional level to offer information at single source
2. More attention to students' concern but limited focus on international students
3. Low level of knowledge and usage of UNESCO portal
4. Mixed response toward rankings
5. Degree mills are mostly unnoticed
6. Evidence of Good practices of Quality information system in some QAAs
7. Need for national and regional information centres with great degree of coordination

Based on findings of survey APQN embarked on mission of developing QIS toolkit by learning from UNESCO Portal, ENQA NARIC and other initiatives.

Existing Templates-

Survey of existing templates was done to identify good models that can be adopted in Asia- Pacific context

Template provided by UNESCO

1. HEIs recognized by competent authorities
2. Higher education programmes recognized by competent authorities
3. Information for students planning to study in the country
4. Information on the higher education system
 - Description of the education system
 - Competent bodies
 - Ministries/departments responsible for education
 - Quality assurance mechanisms
5. Information on foreign credential assessment and recognition
 - Description (procedures)
 - Competent bodies
6. Information on financial assistance opportunities
 - For national students planning to study abroad
 - For international students planning to study in the country
 - Scholarships
7. Cross-border higher education
8. National information centre
9. Other information sources
10. Definitions of key terms

(Source- UNESCO Website)

Template provided by ENIC NARIC [Source ENIC- NARIC website]

- [National Information Centres](#)
- [National education bodies](#)
- [System of education](#)
- [University education](#)
- [Quality Assurance in Higher Education](#)
- [Post-secondary non-university education](#)
- [Recognized higher education institutions](#)
- [Policies and procedures for the recognition of qualifications](#)
- [Qualifications Framework](#)
- [Diploma Supplement Information](#)

UNESCO Bangkok's Education System Profile

These profiles on a webpage provide a snapshot of a country's education sector, major challenges, education-related statistics, and links to legislation and policy documents. Following is the template.

- Country Background
- Education Sector overview
- Sector wide challenges
- Early childhood
- Basic Education
- Higher TVET
- Non –formal and informal education
- International Cooperation
- Links
- References

These templates provided very good starting point for development of quality information toolkit.

Roadmap for Asia-Pacific Educational Quality Information Portal- APEQUIP

Following plan of action is the outcome of survey of Asia Pacific region on quality information system, analyses and suggestions emerged from deliberations of the workshop held in Quezon City, Philippines on 9th July 2012.

APQN will dedicate a webpage or a portal that will provide listing and links to all QAAs and national information centres [Ministries or other bodies responsible in respective country to provide information on higher education systems] in Asia Pacific region. This will be on lines ENIC NARIC. This portal will also provide links to other international and regional databases websites such as UNESCO portal, ENIC NARIC, etc.

The draft toolkit containing the template at 3 levels is proposed below:

APQN QIS Toolkit

International/Regional level	National Level	Institutional Level
Basic Information		
1.About Asia Pacific region	1.Competent authorities to recognize/ permit operations of HEIs	1.Approved name of institution and the sponsoring trust/society
2.Contact details of QAAs	2. HEIs recognized by	2. Competent authority

and competent authorities concerning higher education in countries/ territories in the Asia Pacific region	competent authorities	which permitted/ recognised HEI
3.Contact details of National Information Centres in the Asia pacific region	3.Higher education programmes recognized by competent authorities	3. Period of validity of registration and/or recognition
4.Link to UNESCO Portal on higher education	4. Information for students planning to study in the country <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visa requirements • Living costs • Language requirements 	4. Registration / recognition/ certification numbers, if applicable
5.Link to ENIC-NARIC network and other related recognition networks and international databases	5.Information on the higher education system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the education system • Progression chart • Competent bodies • Ministries/departments responsible for education • Quality assurance mechanisms/bodies • Types of institutions • List of accredited/ quality assured HEIs and programmes 	5. List of constituent units and programmes offered
6.Link to INQAAHE and other regional QA networks	6. Cross-border higher education- regulations, authorities, facilitating organisations and lists of offerings.	6. Faculty members list
	7. National Information Centre contact details	7. Admission policy, procedures, dates and

		fees
	8. Information on degree mills / alerts on fake institutions	8. Status of quality assurance / accreditation
	9. Links to UNESCO portal, APQN portal and other national / international information sources	9. Contact details of relevant QA body and state authorities
		10. Other information as required by national laws/regulations
Advanced Information		
1..Link to CHEA portal	1. Information on foreign credential assessment and recognition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description (procedures) • Competent bodies 	1. History
2.Links to alerts on degree mills and accreditation mills	3. National Qualifications framework including credit systems and learning outcomes etc.	2. Location and Infrastructure
	4. Definition of key terms	3. Accommodation facilities and costs
		4. Student Services and Support
		5. Scholarships, Free-ships and Loans
		6. Government Grants
		7. Faculty Quality
		8. Grievance redressal mechanisms for students
		9. Financial resources
		10. Library acquisitions
		11. Research output
		12. Teaching assessment
		13. Learning outcomes
		14. Information point for international students

		15. Graduation rates
		16. Employment rates
		17. Visa requirements

[Source- Patil and Angela et al, unpublished APQN Project Report, 2012]

As a result of the survey and analysis of the responses the project group strongly recommended the setting up Asia-Pacific Educational Quality Information Portal- APEQUIP on lines of ENIC NARIC. Study on various international information networks has provided a way for the toolkit development. Approach should be to fill the gaps and provide connections to existing information networks.

Based on the project group recommendations APQN has planned following measures to be initiated .

- Advocacy to QAAs for joining UNESCO Portal
- Dissemination of good practices in Quality information
- Supporting QAAs to develop national information systems
- Further consultations and Pilot implementation of Toolkit and templates before launching of portal
- Supporting HEIs to develop information systems at institutional level.
- Regional portal to act as single point resource of information on quality of HEIs to stakeholders like students, HEIs and employers.

It is believed that if APQN succeeds in setting up Quality information systems in the region, it will not only provide good alternative to Ranking but also it will be an unique service to students and other stakeholders across Asia Pacific as well as globally.

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