

DEVELOPING AN AGREED SET OF PRINCIPLES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE BROADER ASIA-PACIFIC

DISCUSSION PAPER

**Workshop on Higher Education Quality Assurance in the Asia Pacific
18 February 2008, Chiba City, Japan**

**Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Canberra, Australia, February 2008**

Purpose

This discussion paper has been prepared to inform discussion at the Quality Assurance workshop being organised by the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) in collaboration with the Australian Government in Tokyo, Japan, on 18 February 2008.

The paper is intended to assist discussion on quality assurance in the broader Asia-Pacific region, and on the merits of developing an agreed set of higher education quality assurance principles linked to international standards that reflect national interests in this region. A collaborative effort involving both Quality Assurance Agencies and governments will be necessary to develop common QA principles.

The paper provides a draft set of possible elements of a framework for quality assurance principles (Figure 1) which are intended to provide a focal point for discussion and consideration in terms of a possible consensus around broad principles applicable for countries in the region.

Background

The Brisbane Communiqué (BC) initiative was launched at a meeting of Ministers and senior officials from 27 countries from across the broader Asia-Pacific region in Brisbane, Australia on 3-4 April 2006. The common goal of the Brisbane Communiqué is to increase student and academic mobility and transferability of qualifications, and greater integration or exchangeability of education frameworks. Towards this goal Ministers and senior officials identified four areas for collaboration:

1. quality assurance frameworks for the region linked to international standards, including courses delivered online;
2. recognition of educational and professional qualifications;
3. common competency based standards for teachers, particularly in science and mathematics; and,
4. development of common recognition of technical skills across the region in order to better meet the overall skills needs of the economic base of the region.

Progressing these initiatives is the responsibility of a Senior Officials Working Group (SOWG) chaired by Australia and supported by the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). To progress collaboration in the area of quality assurance framework, DEEWR contracted the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) to do a scoping study on quality assurance arrangements in the region to identify issues, gaps and solutions already in existence and to recommend future directions. The APQN report included the key recommendation of developing a regional quality assurance framework.

One objective of asking the APQN to undertake the scoping study was to identify whether it would be feasible to establish principles for Quality Assurance in the Asia-Pacific region. This paper draws on the findings and recommendations of the APQN study. The APQN study scoped quality assurance developments in the broader Asia-Pacific region and related these to the *International Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education (INQAAHE) Good Practice Guidelines* and also, to a lesser extent, the *OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross Border Higher Education*. Many of the recommendations in the APQN report are drawn from this comparison, and thereby many of the recommendations relate to elements that could form part of a set of principles of quality assurance relevant to the objectives of countries in the broader Asia-Pacific region.

In addition to the APQN report, this paper also takes into consideration as a basis of good practice the *European Standard for Quality Assurance* which was developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA), through its members and in cooperation with key European higher education bodies, as part of the Bologna Process. It also considers the *OECD Policy Directions for Quality Assurance* that came out of the *OECD Thematic Review of Tertiary Education* (Appendix 1).

Why Establish Principles of Quality Assurance for the Broader Asia-Pacific Region?

All over the world there is an increasing interest in quality and standards, reflecting both the rapid growth of higher education, its cost to the public and the private purse, its valuable contribution to national

economies and productivity, and the need to ensure high quality. As higher education moves beyond national borders, efforts in international cooperation in quality assurance have increased. This has included the establishment of standards in quality assurance as mentioned above. For example, at the first UNESCO Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications, UNESCO proposed an Action Plan which included updating regional conventions to that they better respond to the new challenges of a changing higher education environment and the development of regional quality assurance capacity; and more recently the OECD's Thematic Review of Tertiary Education encourages the continued implementation of the international standards and guidelines on quality assurance.

The broader Asia-Pacific region encompasses a diversity of education systems with growing and developing quality assurance agencies. A common set of principles of quality assurance for the region has the potential to demonstrate a commitment to assuring quality of higher education in the region and facilitate regional student and academic mobility and exchange.

A regional approach and commitment to a set of agreed good practices would be valuable to ensure regional alignment in addressing QA issues. If countries do not reflect collectively on what is good for the regional development and agree on a framework to be adhered to amidst all the diversities, maximising the benefits of the various national initiatives for regional development will prove to be difficult (APQN, 2007).

The APQN report also found that, in terms of attention to international codes and guidelines, there is awareness among the quality assurance bodies of the region, but limited action towards adhering to those guidelines such as the INQAAHE and OECD Guidelines. The establishment of principles based on international standards could contribute to the region developing an international reputation as a viable and complementary educational system. It would demonstrate to the world the commitment that Asia-Pacific countries have for higher education systems that are on par with global counterparts. A common set of principles would help provide consistency and benchmarking in the region that would contribute to quality improvement in delivery of education, increase confidence about qualifications and bring countries into alignment with international developments.

The establishment of a shared set of quality assurance principles could also provide a step towards strengthening regional collaboration and mutual trust and understanding. A shared set of principles specifically developed for our region has the potential to facilitate good relations between member states and enhance social and economic development by strengthening higher education and facilitating the international mobility of students and research collaboration.

The Bologna Experience

In the European arena international cooperation with the Bologna Process has contributed to capacity building at both institutional and governmental levels across a wide range of countries with varying levels of capacity in higher education. One of the main objectives of the Bologna Process is the promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance. As part of this objective the European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA), through its members and in cooperation with key European higher education bodies, developed the *European Standard for Quality Assurance*. These standards and guidelines were formally adopted by Ministers in Bergen in 2005 and have since been widely disseminated, discussed and promoted.

The impact of this focus on quality has been considerable. On the nature and extent of implementation of the quality reforms resulting from the Bologna Process the European Universities Association (EUA) Trends V: Universities shaping the European Higher Education Area report states that:

The focus on quality in the Bologna process has certainly raised awareness within higher education institutions of the potential benefits and challenges of effective quality assurance and enhancement activities. More constructive discussion between institutions, quality assurance agencies, stakeholders and public authorities appears to be taking place, and the involvement of students in quality assurance activities also seems to be gaining ground. Indeed in some parts of Europe, quality assurance seems to be replacing degree structure reform as the main topic of interest in the Bologna process (p.9).

The 2007 stocktake of the Bologna Process notes that while there has been progress across the board in the area of quality assurance, the establishment of a genuine quality enhancement culture in higher education institutions is the future guarantee of sustainable quality. However, the report concludes that the achievement of a “quality culture” will be the task for the coming years and can only be realised by bringing all the elements of quality assurance together. This is an important pointer for consideration of quality assurance in the broader Asia-Pacific region.

Issues in Establishing Quality Assurance Principles

Diversity of region: Countries and higher education systems across the broader Asia-Pacific region are very diverse. The principles need to be robust enough to build trust and confidence between the countries in the region but still recognise and accommodate the diversity of systems and national interests. In doing so, the effectiveness of such principles is likely to have a greater impact as they allow preservation of the national character of the higher education system of the country.

Research on the effects of the Bologna Process has found that changes that have occurred within the framework of the Bologna Process have been largely because the international context was consistent with nationally grounded preferences (van der Wende, 2007, p.284). Similarly, when establishing a set of principles on quality assurance, it is important to ensure that principles are general enough to fit the national context for each country’s higher education system.

Variations in quality assurance frameworks: The APQN report noted considerable variations in the characteristics of quality assurance frameworks within the region such as:

- Unit of quality assurance: Institution vs Programs
- Nature of the quality assurance process: Mandatory vs Voluntary
- Aspects considered for quality assurance
- Role of higher education institutions in constituting the review team
- Role of agency staff in on-site visit
- Disclosure of quality assurance outcomes
- Implications of quality assurance outcome
- Appeals mechanism
- Post-quality assurance follow-up

However the same study did identify some common critical core elements in quality assurance systems of the region, which could serve as a main source for the development of a set of principles on quality assurance. These commonalities were:

1. Evaluation based on pre-determined and transparent criteria: A set of standards and criteria or scope of areas to be covered are determined by the quality assurance agency in advance and are applied objectively to all institutions of higher education or their programs in the country. The agencies generally have national consultations and ensure wide participation of the stakeholders in evolving the standards and criteria.
2. Process based on a combination of self-study and peer review: The institution (or program) undergoing the process is asked to do a self study (evaluation) and report on how it meets the standards set or criteria identified by the agency. The level of analysis involved in the self-study report varies. A team of external peers constituted by the agency analyses the self-study report of the institution and validates the claims made there in, generally by visiting the institution.
3. Final decision-making: Based on the self-evaluation of the institution or program and the recommendations of the peer team, the agency takes the responsibility for the final decision through an appropriate process. When higher education institutions do not agree with the final decision of the agency, it generally leads to an appeal or grievance.

4. Public disclosure of the outcome: In all the quality assurance mechanisms, there is an element of public disclosure of the outcome, although the extent of public disclosure varies. It may vary from disclosure of only the final outcome, as in the case of a typical accreditation, to disclosure of the full assessment report as in the case of a typical audit.
5. Validity of the outcome for a specific period of time: The outcome is generally valid for five to ten years, five years being the predominant one.

Smaller states: The APQN survey notes that that quality assurance in smaller states has its own unique set of issues. The region has a significant number of smaller states with notable concentrations in the South Pacific, South East Asia and the Middle East. The combined effort of these countries may provide the critical base necessary for an effective regional quality assurance strategy that suits the particular contexts of smaller higher education systems. Thereby the adoption of a set of quality assurance principles by these states will need to be supported by other initiatives such as that recommended by the APQN report:

- a) *Strengthen cooperation among small states and explore a regional strategy that will help them join the main stream developments in QA.*
- b) *Explore the scope for collaboration of small states with their geographical neighbours that are not necessarily small states.*

Quality improvement vs Bureaucratic Burden: In accordance with existing international quality assurance guidelines, any development of a regional framework for quality assurance must not be viewed as prescriptions of good practice or considered mandatory. The principles must serve to enhance quality rather than force compliance with bureaucratic requirements.

Consultation with stakeholders: Is there a need to further consult with the key players in the higher education system of each of the countries; i.e. students, academics, policy makers, so as to enhance opportunities for awareness, advocacy and uptake?

The APQN study notes that “QA can no longer operate in isolation. Many stakeholders need to be involved in QA discussions. At the international and regional levels, a multi-pronged approach is necessary to bring in the perspectives of the stakeholders in discussions on QA issues. One reason that the Bologna process started slowly was that there was insufficient involvement of all the relevant parties. Noting this, the Asia-Pacific region needs to be cautious in avoiding the recurrence of the same problem.”

Translation and interpretation: In establishing a set of principles it is important to ensure that they are written in a way that can be understood and approved by international partners. This is also true in the case of the translation of the principles into the various languages of the region. How will there be monitoring of accurate translation and shared interpretation?

The APQN study reports that although many countries pay attention to the public nature of the framework, there are considerable variations in the way quality assurance systems understand, define and interpret quality, standards and indicators of quality. Even within the same country there seems to be huge differences among key players in quality assurance. In establishing a set of shared quality assurance principles it is also important to clarify the terminology surrounding quality assurance, so that countries have agreement on a glossary of terms.

Other higher education initiatives: In addition to establishing a set of shared principles in quality assurance, the APQN report identifies a number of other initiatives that could be undertaken to strengthen the quality assurance frameworks in the region. The establishment of a set of quality assurance principles for the region could potentially be a most effective means by which to enhance student mobility and mutual understanding.

Other areas in need of attention raised by the APQN report include:

- aspects that some regional countries need to address to meet the INQAAHE guidelines (such as independence of quality assurance agencies);
- further reflection as to what is the minimum that should be made public from the outcomes of the quality assurance process; and

- better defined and more consistent appeals procedures and establishment of a national qualifications framework.

The APQN study also put forward recommendations for:

- developing a common quality assurance terminology;
- strengthening research and publication on quality assurance in the region; and
- developing a regional pool of reviewers.

Establishing a Framework for the Development of a Set of Quality Assurance Principles

In addition to the identified areas of commonality in quality assurance practices in the region, the existence of a number of international guidelines and standards on quality assurance also provide useful reference points for thinking about the structure and content of a regional framework of principles on quality assurance. Key international guidelines include:

- I. European Quality Assurance Standards;
- II. INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice; and
- III. OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education.

The above guidelines have been developed for different purposes. The European Standards on Quality Assurance take into account higher education institutions, external quality assurance activities and external audits, being divided into three key areas: Part A – Internal quality assurance within higher education institutions; Part B – External quality assurance of higher education; and, Part C – External quality assurance agencies. This contrasts with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice which focus on quality assurance agencies. The OECD guidelines aim to provide an international framework for quality provision in cross border education.

Despite the fact that these guidelines have been developed for different purposes, there is some overlap in the areas covered. It is also valuable to refer to the Draft APQN report on *Quality Assurance Arrangements in Higher Education in the Brisbane Communiqué Region* which considered trends in quality assurance in the region and compared these against the INQAAHE guidelines. Appendix 2 provides a matrix that attempts to compare the international guidelines with the recommendations of the APQN study.

From this comparison, the draft set of principles at Figure 1 has been prepared as a starting point for discussion. Figure 2 includes a set of numbers next to each principle. This is to provide a cross reference to the principles listed in Table A at Appendix 2.

Figure 1 attempts to distil the key elements of what might constitute a framework for quality assurance principles in the region. The framework has three key components:

- A. ***Institutional Quality Assurance*** outlines the key internal quality assurance standards to be facilitated by the higher education institutions themselves. These activities are also taken into account when the institution is externally assessed.
- B. ***External Quality Assessment*** outlines the process and content of an external quality assessment of an institution.
- C. ***Quality Assurance Agencies*** outlines the key standards of how quality assurance agencies should be structured and managed if they are to effectively conduct external assessments.

The components may not be mutually exclusive. For example, a quality assurance agency conducting an external assessment may adopt the processes identified for external quality assessment. In so doing, it would be anticipated that the agency would have had some dialogue with the institution regarding the process and the standards it may apply. Alternatively, a mature institution may independently pursue external assessment of some or all of its activities or operations and in so doing may adopt, as a matter of good practice, some or all of the processes indicated for external quality assessment. The key issue here

is whether a separate component is required for the process of external quality assessment as opposed to including such processes within the component for Quality Assurance Agencies. The approach adopted in the paper is to separate the components (which is similar to the approach adopted by the European Quality Assurance Standards) as a basis for further discussion at the workshop.

The framework should be considered a starting point for discussion. The following section attempts to highlight some questions that might be pertinent to further consideration of the framework. In addition, it should be noted that in developing the framework, it may be helpful to focus on a particular component which would benefit from collaborative action and support and enhance quality assurance within the region. This is not to say that all components are not important, but it may be more practical to develop the principles incrementally.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

Session 1: Developing a draft set of Quality Assurance Principles

- 1a) How can individual countries in our region benefit from a common set of quality assurance principles?
- 1b) Are the identified areas of commonality in the quality assurance systems of the wider Asia-Pacific region and other international sets of quality assurance standards (Table A, Appendix 2) relevant reference points for developing a set of principles for the region?
- 1c) Should the framework consist of the three components of institutional quality assurance, external quality assessment and quality assurance agencies? If not what is a more appropriate structure?
- 1d) Does the draft set of elements or principles (Figure 1) match aspirations for a regional approach to quality assurance?
- 1e) How well does the draft set of elements or principles fit with each country's current quality assurance practices?
- 1f) Are the draft elements or principles broad enough to ensure that the smaller states are not dominated by these principles, but rather enabled to strengthen their own nation's quality assurance processes OR do the principles need a preamble that acknowledges the challenges of the smaller states?
- 1g) Does the framework need to be supported by an agreed glossary of quality assurance terminology?

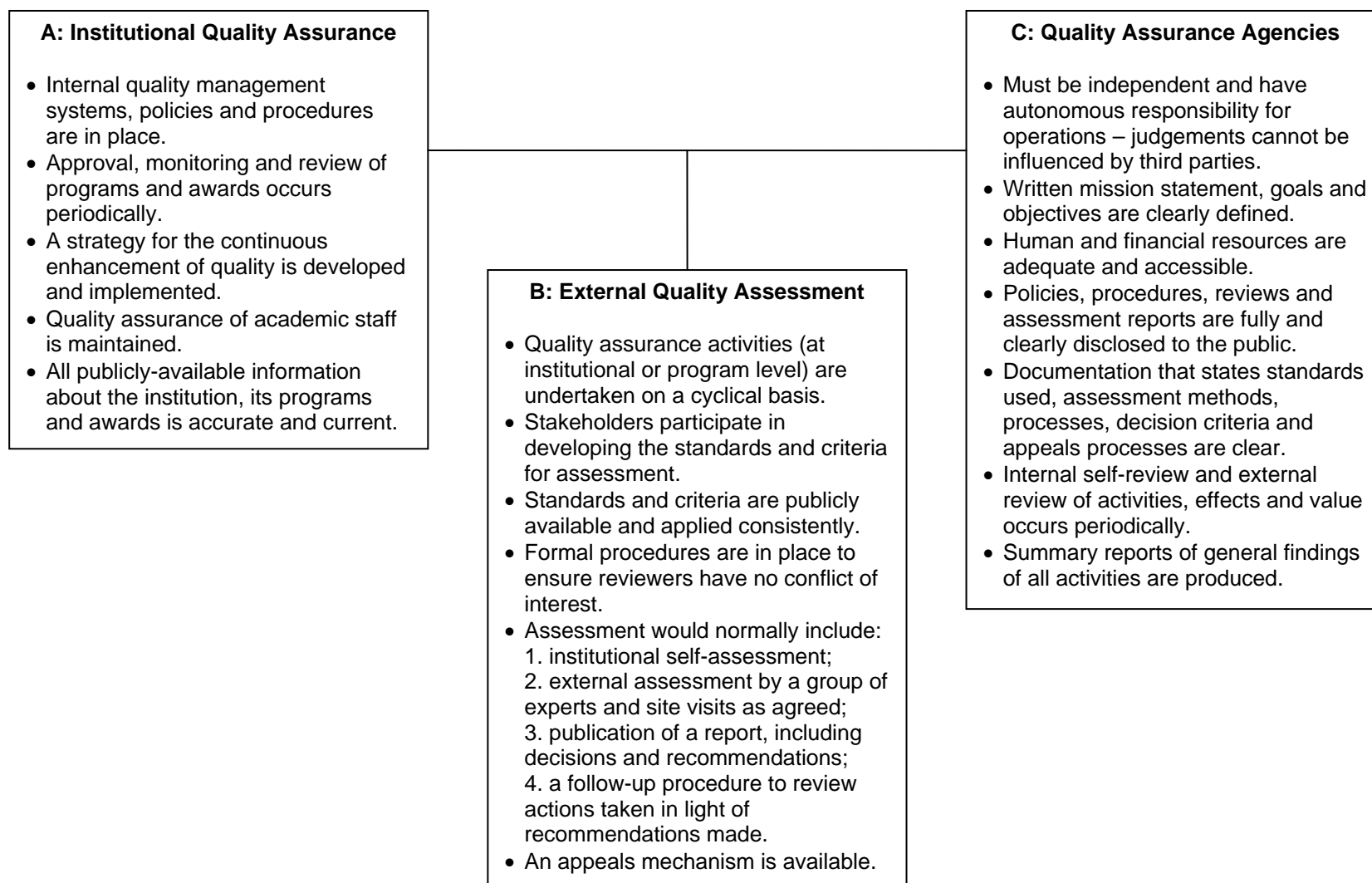
Session 2: A collaborative process to develop Quality Assurance in the region

- 2a) How can we collaboratively work together to further develop the principles selected?
- 2b) What mechanism should be put in place to facilitate collaboration and develop the content of the framework for quality assurance principles?
- 2c) Is there a need to further consult with the key players in the higher education system of each of the participating countries; i.e. students, academics, policy makers, governments, so as to enhance opportunities for awareness, advocacy and uptake?
- 2d) What would be an appropriate timeframe for this project?
- 2e) What steps can be taken to raise awareness of quality assurance among stakeholders?

Session 3: Consolidation of feedback and agreement on key issues

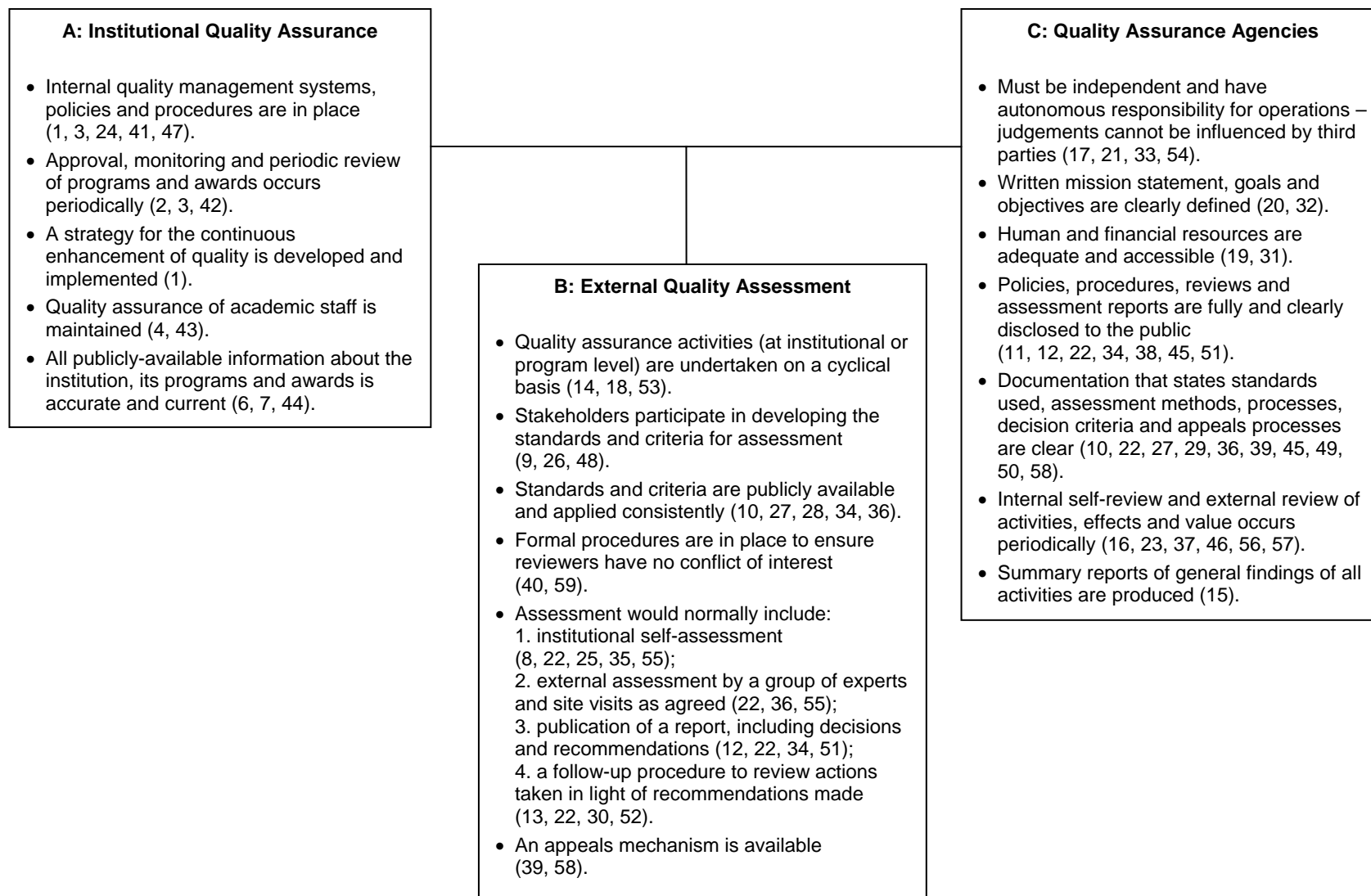
- 3a) Reflect on the discussion of the previous sessions and identify key issues.
- 3b) Prepare summary of feedback.

Figure 1: Possible Components and Elements of a Framework for Quality Assurance Principles in the Asia-Pacific Region¹



¹ The components are the boxes labelled A, B, and C. The elements are the dot points listed within the components.

Figure 2: Possible Components and Elements of a Framework for Quality Assurance Principles in the Asia-Pacific Region
Cross Referenced with Comparison Matrix (Appendix 2)



REFERENCES

APQN (2007) *Quality Assurance Arrangements in Higher Education in the Brisbane Communiqué Region*, November 2007 (Draft version)

Department for Education and Skills (2007) *Bologna Process Stocktaking – London 2007*

Eaton, Judith S. (2004) *The Opportunity Cost of the Pursuit of International Quality Standards, International Higher Education*, Summer 2004

ENQA (2005) *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*

EUA (2007) *Trends V: Universities shaping the European Higher Education Area*

INQAAHE (2007) *Guidelines of Good Practice*

Nyborg, Dr Per (2002) *GATS in light of increasing internationalisation of higher education. Quality assurance and Recognition*

OECD (2005) *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education*

OECD (2007) *Thematic Review of Tertiary Education: Emerging Policy Directions from the Synthesis Report*, 28 – 29 November 2007

OECD (2007) *Cross-border Tertiary Education: a way towards capacity development*

Valiulis, Algirdis; Valiulis, Donatus (2006) *The Internationalisation of Higher Education: a Challenge for Universities*, in *Global Journal of Engaging Education*, Vol 10, No.2, pp 221 – 228

Van der Wende, Marijk (2007) *Internationalisation of Higher Education in the OECD Countries: Challenges and Opportunities for the Coming Decade*, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, Fall/Winter 2007

APPENDIX 1

OECD Policy directions for assuring and improving quality¹

Design of the quality assurance framework

- Build consensus on clear goals and expectations of the quality assurance system
- Ensure that quality assurance serves both the improvement and accountability purposes
- Combine internal and external quality assurance mechanisms
- Build capacity and secure legitimacy
- Make stakeholders, students, graduates, employers, and government visible in evaluation procedures
- Increase focus on student outcomes
- Allow for selected assessments to be initiated by an external quality assurance agency

Internal evaluation

- Develop a strong quality culture in the system
- Put more stress on internal quality assurance mechanisms
- Ensure that internal accountability is guided by some key principles
- Undertake the external validation of internal quality assurance systems

External evaluation

- Ensure that the external quality assurance has an advisory role
- Implement adequate follow-up procedures and view quality assurance as a continuous process
- Avoid direct links between assessment results and public funding decisions

Methods

- Align quality assurance processes to the particular profile of institutions
- Improve co-ordination between the evaluation of teaching and research

Organisation of the quality assurance system

- Avoid fragmentation of the quality assurance organisational structure
- Improve information dissemination
- Avoid excessive costs and burdens
- Enhance the international comparability of the quality of tertiary education
- Develop innovative approaches to quality assurance and quality assurance expertise in new areas

¹Excerpt from the OECD *Thematic Review of Tertiary Education: Emerging Policy Directions from the Synthesis Report (2007)*.

Table A: Quality Assurance Standards – Comparison Matrix

European QA Standards (Bologna)	INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice	OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border HE	Draft APQN Report
(1) <i>Policy and procedures for quality assurance:</i> Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality, and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders.	(24) The EQAA recognises that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves.	(41) Higher education institutions/providers should develop, maintain or review internal quality management systems so that they make full use of the competencies of stakeholders such as academic staff, administrators, students and graduates and take full responsibility for delivering higher education qualifications comparable in standard in their home country and across borders.	(47) <i>Examples of good practice:</i> Emphasis on self-assessment and acknowledging the central place of higher education institutions in external QA.
(2) <i>Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards:</i> Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards.		(42) Higher education institutions/providers should provide accurate, reliable and easily accessible information on the criteria and procedures of external and internal quality assurance and the academic and professional recognition of qualifications they deliver and provide complete descriptions of programmes and qualifications, preferably with descriptions of the knowledge, understanding and skills that a successful student should acquire.	
(3) <i>Assessment of students:</i> Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.			

European QA Standards (Bologna)	INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice	OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border HE	Draft APQN Report
(4) <i>Quality assurance of teaching staff</i> : Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved in the teaching of students are qualified and competent with regard to teaching. The methods and procedures for ensuring that this is the case should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports.		(43) Higher education institutions/providers should recognise that quality teaching is made possible by the quality of faculty and the quality of their working conditions that foster independent and critical enquiry. The UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel and other relevant instruments need to be taken into account by all institutions and providers to support good working conditions and terms of service, collegial governance and academic freedom.	
(5) <i>Learning resources and student support</i> : Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered.			
(6) <i>Information systems</i> : Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities.			
(7) <i>Public information</i> : Institutions should regularly publish up-to-date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering.		(44) Higher education institutions/providers, when promoting their programmes to potential students through agents, should take full responsibility to ensure that the information and guidance provided by their agents are accurate, reliable and easily accessible.	

European QA Standards (Bologna)	INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice	OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border HE	Draft APQN Report
(8) <i>Use of internal quality assurance procedures:</i> External quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part A above.	(25) <i>Decisions:</i> The EQAA evaluations address both the higher education institution's own self-assessment and external reference points, such as judgments by knowledgeable peers or relevant legislation.		
(9) <i>Development of external quality assurance processes:</i> The aims and objectives of quality assurance processes should be determined before the processes themselves are developed, by all those responsible (including higher education institutions) and should be published with a description of the procedures to be used.	(26) <i>Relationship between the EQAA and HEIs:</i> The EQAA applies standards or criteria that have been subject to reasonable consultation with stakeholders with the aim of contributing to both quality improvement and accountability of the institution.	(45) Quality assurance and accreditation bodies should provide accurate and easily accessible information on the assessment standards, procedures, and effects of the quality assurance mechanisms on the funding of students, institutions or programmes where applicable as well as the results of the assessment.	(48) <i>Examples of good practice:</i> Participation of different stakeholders in developing the QA policies and procedures.
(10) <i>Criteria for decisions:</i> All formal decisions made as a result of an external quality assurance activity should be based on explicit published criteria that are applied consistently.	(27) <i>The EQAA's Requirements for Institutional/Program Performance:</i> The EQAA has documents that indicate clearly what the EQAA expects of the institution. Those expectations (which may for example be called standards or factors or precepts) are appropriate for the core activities of an institution of higher education or program.		(49) <i>Evaluation based on pre-determined and transparent criteria:</i> A set of standards and criteria or scope of areas to be covered are determined by the QA agency in advance and are applied objectively to all institutions of higher education of their programs in the country. The agencies generally have national consultations and ensure wide participation of the stakeholders in evolving the standards and criteria. Basis of QA in terms of place given to an institution's own goals and the external standards set by the agency are made clear to the stakeholders, prior to applying the QA procedures.
	(28) <i>EQAA's Evaluation of the Institution and/or Program:</i> The EQAA's system must ensure that each institution or program will be evaluated in an equivalent way, even if the external panels, teams, or committees (together, the "external panels") are different.		(50) <i>Final decision-making:</i> Based on the self-evaluation of the institution or program and the recommendations of the peer team, the agency takes the responsibility for the final decision through an appropriate process.
(11) <i>Processes fit for purpose:</i> All external quality assurance processes should be designed specifically to ensure their fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for them.			

European QA Standards (Bologna)	INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice	OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border HE	Draft APQN Report
(12) <i>Reporting</i> : Reports should be published and should be written in a style which is clear and readily accessible to their intended readership. Any decisions, commendations or recommendations contained in reports should be easy for a reader to find.	(29) <i>Decisions</i> : The EQAA's reported decisions are clear and precise.		(51) <i>Public disclosure of the outcome</i> : In all the quality assurance mechanisms, there is an element of public disclosure of the outcome, although the extent of public disclosure varies. It may vary from disclosure of only the final outcome, as in the case of a typical accreditation, to disclosure of the full assessment report as in the case of a typical audit.
(13) <i>Follow-up procedures</i> : Quality assurance processes which contain recommendations for action or which require a subsequent action plan, should have a predetermined follow-up procedure which is implemented consistently.	(30) <i>Decisions</i> : Consistency in decision-making includes consistency and transparency in processes and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up action.		(52) Appropriate and efficient follow-up procedures suitable to the national context.
(14) <i>Periodic review</i> : External quality assurance of institutions and/or programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis. The length of the cycle and the review procedures to be used should be clearly defined and published in advance.			(53) <i>Validity of the outcome for a specific period of time</i> : The outcome is generally valid for five to ten years, five years be the predominant period.
(15) <i>System-wide analyses</i> : Quality assurance agencies should produce from time to time summary reports describing and analysing the general findings of their reviews, evaluations, assessments etc.			
(16) <i>Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education</i> : The external quality assurance of agencies should take into account the presence and effectiveness of the external quality assurance processes described in Part B above.			

European QA Standards (Bologna)	INQA/AHE Guidelines of Good Practice	OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border HE	Draft APQN Report
(17) <i>Official status</i> : Agencies should be formally recognised by competent public authorities in the European Higher Education Area as agencies with responsibilities for external quality assurance and should have an established legal basis. They should comply with any requirements of the legislative jurisdictions within which they operate.			
(18) <i>Activities</i> : Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities (at institutional or programme level) on a regular basis.			
(19) <i>Resources</i> : Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources, both human and financial, to enable them to organise and run their external quality assurance process(es) in an effective and efficient manner, with appropriate provision for the development of their processes and procedures.	(31) <i>Adequate and accessible resources</i> : The EQAA has adequate and accessible human and financial resources to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach. The resources are also adequate for the appropriate development of the agency.		
(20) <i>Mission statement</i> : Agencies should have clear and explicit goals and objectives for their work, contained in a publicly available statement.	(32) <i>Written mission statement or set of objectives</i> : The EQAA has a written mission statement or set of objectives that takes into account the cultural and historical context of the agency. The statement explicitly provides that external quality assurance is a major activity of the agency, and it requires a systematic approach to achieving the mission or objectives of the agency. There is evidence that the statement of objectives is implemented pursuant to a practical management plan that is linked to resources. Ownership and governance is appropriate for the objectives of the agency.		

European QA Standards (Bologna)	INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice	OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border HE	Draft APQN Report
(21) <i>Independence</i> : Agencies should be independent to the extent both that they have autonomous responsibility for their operations and that their conclusions and recommendations made in their reports cannot be influenced by third parties such as higher education institutions, ministries or other stakeholders.	(33) <i>Decisions</i> : An EQAA must be independent, i.e. it has autonomous responsibility for its operations, and its judgements cannot be influenced by third parties. The EQAA's decisions must be impartial, rigorous, thorough, fair, and consistent, even if the judgments are made by different panels. When the EQAA advises the government or other public bodies, the decisions made by each agency should be made as independently as practicable.		(54) The ownership and governance structure of QA agencies should be such as to ensure their independent functioning and policies and practices that support this, irrespective of ownership, are promoted.
(22) <i>External quality assurance criteria and processes used by the agencies</i> : The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. These processes will normally be expected to include: 1. a self-assessment or equivalent procedure by the subject of the quality assurance process; 2. an external assessment by a group of experts, including, as appropriate, (a) student member(s), and site visits as decided by the agency; 3. publication of a report, including any decisions, recommendations or other formal outcomes; 4. a follow-up procedure to review actions taken by the subject of the quality assurance process in the light of any recommendations contained in the report.	(34) <i>Reporting public information</i> : The EQAA provides full and clear disclosure of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures and criteria. The EQAA also demonstrates public accountability by reporting its decisions about higher education institutions and programs. The content and extent of reporting may vary with cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements. If the external evaluation leads to a decision about the higher education institution or program, the procedures applied and the criteria for decision-making are public, and the criteria for review are transparent, public, and ensure equality of treatment.		

European QA Standards (Bologna)	INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice	OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border HE	Draft APQN Report
	(35) <i>Institutional Self-Evaluation and Reporting to the EQAA</i> : Typically, an EQAA review process includes a self-evaluation through self-study by the institution or program, external peer review, and a follow-up procedure. As necessary and appropriate, the EQAA guides the institution of program in the application of the procedures of the quality assurance process, such as self-evaluation, external review, or solicitation of assessment/feedback from the public, students, and other constituents.		(55) <i>Process based on a combination of self-study and peer review</i> : The institution (or program) undergoing the process is asked to do a self-study (evaluation) and report on how it meets the standards set or criteria identified by the agency. A team of external peers constituted by the agency analyses the self-study report of the institution and validates the claims made there in, generally by visiting the institution.
	(36) <i>EQAA's Evaluation of the Institution and/or Program</i> : The EQAA has clear documentation concerning the external evaluation that states the standards used, assessment methods and processes, decision criteria, and other information necessary for external review. The EQAA also has specifications on the characteristics, selection and training of reviewers. When practicable, the EQAA should include at least one external reviewer from another country or jurisdiction in the external panel.		
(23) <i>Accountability procedures</i> : Agencies should have in place procedures for their own accountability.			(56) QA agencies demonstrate their accountability to various stakeholders by adhering to common standards and criteria of their associations and networks.

European QA Standards (Bologna)	INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice	OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border HE	Draft APQN Report
	(37) <i>Quality assurance of the EQAA:</i> The agency has a system of continuous quality assurance of its own activities that emphasises flexibility in response to the changing nature of higher education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards achievement of its objectives. The EQAA conducts internal self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects and value. The EQAA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals. There is evidence that any required actions are implemented and disclosed.	(46) The quality assurance and accreditation bodies should develop systems of internal quality assurance and regularly undergo external evaluations, making full use of the competencies of stakeholders. Where feasible, consider undertaking experiments in international evaluation of peer reviews.	(57) QA systems monitor their operations through internal controls (such as internal audits, annual reporting requirements, etc), monitoring against targets. Agencies collect feedback from the sector and reviewers systematically and act on the feedback analysis.
	(38) <i>Reporting public information:</i> The EQAA informs and responds to the public in accordance with applicable legislation and the cultural context of the agency. The EQAA also discloses to the public the decisions about the agency resulting from any external review of its own performance.		
	(39) <i>Appeals:</i> The EQAA has appropriate methods and policies for appeals. Appeals should be conducted by reviewers who were not responsible for the original decision and who have not conflict of interest, but appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQAA.		(58) Need an appeals mechanism that provides for those under evaluation an opportunity to express opinions and contest conclusions and decisions resulting from the evaluation outcomes.

European QA Standards (Bologna)	INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice	OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border HE	Draft APQN Report
	(40) <i>EQAA's Evaluation of the Institution and/or Program</i> : The system ensures that external reviewers have no conflicts of interest and have received necessary training.		(59) Quality assurance systems have formal procedures to check whether the reviewers have any conflict of interest with the institution or program to be assessed. "Conflicts of interests" are private interests and circumstances that may compete with one's official actions or duties. Sound policies on conflict of interest are essential to uphold the credibility of the process.