

# University and HEI Associations and Quality Enhancement

## Survey Summary Report

IAU

### *Introduction*

To prepare for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Global Meeting of Associations (Paris, May 2007), focusing on “*The role of associations in enhancing quality of higher education at home and abroad*” the International Association of Universities (IAU) asked attending leaders of national, regional and international university associations a series of questions that described their role in enhancing or promoting quality of higher education offered by their members at home and abroad.

Of the 34 university associations which participated in the Global Meeting (20 national, 8 regional and 6 international associations), 22 associations completed the questionnaire. The complete list of associations that replied is enclosed in Annex 1; the list of questions is enclosed as Annex 2. Thirteen responses were from national associations and nine questionnaires were completed by regional associations. This represents a rather satisfying response rate of 64.7%, though the initial sample was very small. Even more satisfying though was the effort and richness of some of the replies received. These attested to the importance assigned to the issue of quality of higher education by some associations and of the interest in the issues by those associations that are yet to develop actions and member services in this area.

The results are interesting because despite the small sample, responses were received from associations in all regions of the world. To contextualize the responses more, respondents were also asked to identify whether they considered themselves as coming mostly from a host country/region or one which sent its students abroad. Close to 30% of the responding associations identified themselves as coming from country/region that acted mostly as hosts in terms of cross-border higher education. More than 17% described their association as being in “mostly a sending country/region”. 53% indicated that they were in a region/country that acted as both host and sender. Thus the survey offers a representative sample as the aim of the survey, and more generally the goal of the Meeting, was to learn the different roles university associations may play to enhancing quality of higher education at home and abroad.

Among information gathered, we can note that all responding university associations have a permanent secretariat (of course with significant differences in size of staff), but only slightly more than half of them (54.5%) have a Committee, a Task Force or a special Unit specifically focusing on quality of higher education.

Please note that percentages indicated are based on the number of actual replies, noting though that not all respondents answered all questions and options proposed, considering for some of them that they were not applicable to them.

## ***1. The approach to quality assurance of higher education***

In investigating the approach to quality assurance of higher education adopted in their respective countries/regions university associations could select various options or describe their own. Results show that the two most common approaches adopted are “promoting quality culture in HEIs” and “programme level accreditation”, with respectively 73.7% and 63.2% of responses.

This result confirms quite clearly that the responsibility for quality is perceived as resting first and foremost in the institutions of higher education and that it is decentralized to the programme level rather than being monitored at the institutional level. This result also echoes the current policy trends and approaches adopted in Europe both by the EU and within the Bologna Process.

The results show that accreditation is a far more common approach to quality assurance than the quality audit. However, it is more frequent at the level of programmes than at the level of institutions.

The open-ended part of this question yielded remarks with regard to contextual/national specificities as well as examples including:

- the situation of some countries, like Canada, where approaches to quality are different in each province, as each province has its own law to regulate higher education;
- the example of Australia where the approach adopted is a combination of internal and external quality assurance mechanisms;
- using dissemination of Good Practice examples to promote a quality culture in HEIs.

## ***2. The role of university associations in enhancing quality of higher education at home***

According to the replies, there is much diversity with regard to the specific role played by university associations in enhancing quality of higher education in the national or local context. Nevertheless, most associations describe their primary roles as raising awareness of this question and information dissemination to sensitize their members to the importance of quality issues.

Initiatives undertaken to raise awareness, range from the organisation of conferences and seminars to the provision of training programmes for educational administrators. Some university associations disseminate Good Practice examples to their members, while others elaborate policy positions, codes of good conduct and/or guidelines.

As well, it is interesting to note that a few university associations are indeed assessing the quality of education delivered by their institutional members. In some cases, (for

example in India) this takes the form of programme and institutional benchmarking and evaluation by peers. One association, namely the AUCC in Canada, includes, as one of the criteria for admission to institutional membership, the requirement to have a specific institutional quality assurance policy. The association urges its members to monitor quality on a regular basis both internally and externally.

## ***2. The role of university associations in enhancing quality of higher education abroad***

The role associations play in enhancing quality of the higher education offered abroad varies significantly as well, though some commonalities can be observed.

The action of most respondents in this particular field focuses mainly on providing reliable sources of information to their member institutions, and more generally to students and foreign partners, through their websites, reports and the organization of conferences, seminars and/or forums aimed at discussing and promoting the topic of quality assurance and showcasing Good Practices in international initiatives.

It is also interesting to note that various national university associations indicated that part of their action in this field is to commit and participate to initiatives and projects launched by the regional university associations to which they belong. From responses received, it appears that the level of commitment and the nature of initiatives implemented vary greatly from one region to the other, with Europe, through EUA, being the region that has advanced furthest in this process.

## ***3 Other Actors in Enhancing Quality Higher Education***

Most Associations identified *government*, and more especially the Ministries of Higher Education, as one of the main actors in quality enhancement of higher education. The role of the state ranges from providing legislative frameworks and guidelines in this field to recognition/accreditation (by a ministry unit devoted to this task) of institutions, degrees and/or programmes. The links between Ministries and university associations are usually non-formal ones: representatives of associations pursue dialogue with Ministries on a regular basis, sharing information and advice with their decision-makers.

Responses confirm that many countries have now put in place independent *Q.A Agencies* which play a major role in this field. Associations that responded to the questions generally indicated that they have no formal links with these entities, but are very often in contact with them to share information and opinions. There are a number of exceptions to this, though, as for example in Ireland, the Irish Universities Quality Board, whose head attended the Global Meeting, is actually a creation of the Irish Universities Association.

As well, some respondents pointed to *professional bodies* as important stakeholders in the quality enhancement process as they often provide expertise to evaluate programmes and degrees in their respective disciplines/areas.

Finally, in keeping with the notion that the primary responsibility for quality rests with the institutions themselves, some respondents list *higher education institutions (HEIs)* as important actors in Q.A., explaining that they carry out evaluation (internal and/or external) of their own institution and/or programmes and degrees on a regular basis.

#### ***4. Major challenges concerning quality of higher education***

Not all respondents completed this open-ended question inviting them to describe the major challenge they face concerning quality of higher education. The most salient comments among those that were provided include the following:

- governments and QA agencies' push for accountability becoming greater and more intrusive;
- challenge to maintain quality standards of higher education when facing increased demand for access;
- need to make foreign partners aware of respective national higher education quality systems (definition, standards, mechanisms...) to facilitate cooperation and understanding and need to achieve a common language and understanding of the concept of quality;
- there is a link between international competitiveness and an efficient QA mechanisms;
- lack of relevant framework for quality assurance in higher education beyond the national boundaries;
- need to offer HEIs relevant and constantly improved tools to assist them in their processes to enhance quality of higher education.

#### ***5. The possible role of IAU***

Again, the response to this question was only partial but the most frequent suggestions and comments include the following:

- provision of a global forum for discussion of this question and stimulate debate through conferences and seminars;
- increasing awareness of quality assurance issues especially vis-à-vis governments;
- dissemination of Good Practice guidelines for Q.A;
- provision of information and details on key international Q.A initiatives/organizations as well as identify and list experts in quality evaluation and assessment in various countries/regions of the world;
- provision of comparative studies and analysis of various QA systems at national and regional levels.

### ***Conclusion***

The discussions during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Global Meeting of Associations, even more than the factual information provided in the questionnaire, demonstrated that higher education

institutions and their associations are taking quality very seriously. Some Associations have developed a variety of services for their members but for the most part, associations are focusing on offering a forum for sharing of good practices and raising their members' awareness of the importance of these issues.

In their suggestions for the role that IAU may play in the future, it is thus not surprising to note that they wish for this global association to continue to offer the same: a global forum for debate, for comparing practices and for learning about what approaches work best. Clearly there is a strong recognition that the national and increasingly the regional context determine the role that any association may play in enhancing quality of higher education but there is also a deep conviction that each university association must offer its membership ways to address this area.

IAU will continue to seek ways to be useful to its Member Organizations (ie. University/HEI associations at national and regional levels) by collecting and disseminating information and by convening, in 2009 a 3<sup>rd</sup> Global Meeting. So, as we disseminate this summary report and as Associations that we unable to attend the 2<sup>nd</sup> Global Meeting read about it on the IAU website, we welcome additional, completed questionnaires. (see Annex 2)

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## **Annex 1**

Replies received from:

- **ASSOCIATION OF ARAB UNIVERSITIES (AArU)**
- **AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION (ACE)**
- **ASSOCIATION OF INDIAN UNIVERSITIES (AIU)**
- **ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES OF CATALONIA (APUC)**
- **ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING (ASAIHL)**
- **ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITIES AND COLEGES OF CANADA (AUCC)**
- **AUSTRALIAN VICE-CHANCELLORS' COMMITTEE (AVCC)**
- **COMPOSTELA GROUP OF UNIVERISITIES (CGU)**
- **COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION (CHEA)**
- **CONSORTIUM FOR NORTH AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION COLLABORATION (CONAHEC)**
- **CONFERENCE DES PRESIDENTS D'UNIVERSITE (CPU)**
- **CZECH RECTORS CONFERENCE (CRC)**
- **CONFERENCE DES RECTEURS ET DES PRINCIPAUX DES UNIVERSITES DU QUEBEC (CREPUQ)**
- **EUROMED PERMANENT UNIVERSITY FORUM (EPUF)**
- **EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION (EUA)**
- **HIGHER EDUCATION SOUTH AFRICA (HESA)**
- **IRISH UNIVERSITIES QUALITY BOARD (IUQB)**
- **OECD PROGRAMME ON INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION (OECD/IMHE)**

- AUSTRIAN RECTORS' CONFERENCE (OR)
- RED DE MACROUNIVERSIDADES DE AMERICA LATINA Y EL CARIBE
- UNION OF NON-GOUVERNMENTAL HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OF MOSCOW AND MOSCOW REGION (SNV)
- UNION OF LATIN-AMERICAN AND THE CARIBBEAN UNIVERSITIES (UDUAL)

## Annex 2

Series of questions:

### General Information

- Name of your Association: \_\_\_\_\_
- Country/Region: \_\_\_\_\_
- Number of member institutions: \_\_\_\_\_
- Does the Association have a permanent Secretariat? \_\_\_\_\_
- Number of staff in Secretariat: \_\_\_\_\_
- Is there a Committee, Task Force or staff unit focusing on Quality? \_\_\_\_\_

1) In terms of the approach to quality assurance of higher education adopted in your country/region, which of the options presented below, best describes the predominant trend in your country?

- a) promoting quality culture in HEIs
- b) programme level accreditation
- c) institutional level accreditation
- d) quality audit
- e) other (describe briefly) \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

2) In terms of cross-border higher education, which of the descriptions below best suits your country/region?

a) mostly a sending country?

b) mostly a host country?

c) both?

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

3) Quality is of high interest for both domestic and cross-border higher education.

a) What role does your association play in enhancing quality of higher education at home?

\_\_\_\_\_

b) What role does your association play in enhancing quality of higher education abroad?

\_\_\_\_\_

4) What other actors are playing a role in this domain in your country/region?

- What is their role?

- How is your association linked?

<b><u>Actor</u></b>	<b><u>Role</u></b>	<b><u>Link to your association</u></b>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

5) What are the major aspects/issues/challenges you encounter concerning quality of higher education?

\_\_\_\_\_

6) What could IAU do most usefully to help your Association address these challenges?