



Student Participation in Quality Assurance

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Introduction

The Quality Assurance in Higher Education is gaining wider acceptance amongst the stakeholders across the globe. Even though the quality assurance mechanisms in different countries in Asia Pacific Region are at different level of maturity and capacity, there is a broad agreement on need and effectiveness of quality assurance. So far, the projects initiated by the APQN have dealt with key topics like Qualification Framework, Mutual Recognition of Quality Assurance Agencies, Indicators of Quality, Quality Assurance of Distance Education/e-learning etc. Now that large number of countries in Asia Pacific Region are in the process of establishing quality assurance mechanisms and a few experienced agencies are maturing further, the efforts of APQN are oriented towards building the capacity of new emerging agencies, reforming the capacity of veteran agencies and initiate the capacity where there are no agencies. It is at this juncture the promotion and advocacy of student participation in quality assurance would be one of the most relevant initiatives. Hence this proposal is placed to consideration of APQN to initiate a new project group on 'Student Participation in Quality Assurance'

Relevance and Practices

The students are, unarguably, the most important stakeholders of Higher Education systems and also that of quality assurance mechanisms therein. The interest and participation of students at all levels in both internal quality assurance and external quality assurance have to play a central role. Any Higher Education Institution needs to ensure that students have voice at all stages of the decision making process, formulating learning and teaching practices, and that views of students are to be considered as the primary evidence on which the quality of teaching and learning is evaluated. Even as the central role of student in Higher Education System is agreed in principle by the policy makers and decision makers, the experience of actual involvement of students vary to a large extent from one country to another. A commendable work in this regard has been done by ESIB – The national Unions of Students of Europe. The ESIB has taken up the cause of advancing student involvement in QA in a systematic manner and has completed a detailed project on this issue. The Luxembourg declaration of March 2005 has also drawn attention of Higher Education Community towards the urgent need of addressing the issue of student involvement in quality assurance. The declaration points out:

“Although we see progress in the implementation of systems of quality assurance in some Bologna participating countries, we are dissatisfied with the insufficient involvement of students. ESI B’s survey clearly shows that in the vast majority of the countries students are not fully involved in all parts of internal and external quality assurance. Being full partners in Higher Education, students must always be included in all aspects and levels of quality assurance.”

The declaration supports the establishment of a peer review system for Quality Assurance agencies, which should make clear which of them, fulfil a set of quality standards and which do not. But insists that it should be clear that the peer reviews and inclusion in a European register can only be regarded as independent and trust worthy if it is carried out under the supervision and has the ownership of the main stakeholders in higher education, namely representatives from HEIs, quality assurance agencies, governments and students.

Another noteworthy initiative of student participation in Quality Assurance is:

Sparqs (Student Participation in Quality Scotland). This unique body at Scotland assists and supports students, students' associations and institutions to improve the effectiveness of student engagement in quality processes and provides advice to the Funding Councils and institutions on good practice in the engagement of students in institutions' quality processes.

Sparqs aims at mapping the quality and quantity of student representation systems and structures across Scotland; Identifying the needs of the various educational institutions, students' associations and students in ensuring quality student representative systems and structures across Scotland; and providing training and development to enhance student representation systems and structures across Scotland.

While there are such laudable initiatives of organised efforts for ensuring student participation in quality assurance, the overall scenario in this regard, as seen the world over, is not encouraging. In Asia Pacific Region the different countries have some kind of mechanisms for involving students in Internal as well as External Quality Assurance Processes. But these cases are sporadic in nature and needs to be surveyed and documented properly. The present project proposal aims to draw from successful initiatives like ESIB Quality Assurance Project and Sparqs and at the same time proposes to bridge the information/documentation gap on this issue among the APQN member agencies.

Key Objectives

The project on Student Participation in Quality Assurance aims at fulfilling the following key objectives:

- To collect, analyse and disseminate theory, good practices and experiences of student participation in quality assurance in Asia Pacific Region.
- To promote exchange of good practices in student participation in quality assurance between different countries.
- To raise awareness of the importance of student participation in quality assurance processes among all stakeholders.
- To Identify and promote Asia Pacific wide strategies to involve students and student organisations in quality assurance, both internal as well as external.
- To advocate co-operation among student organisations of different countries of Asia Pacific on Quality Assurance related issues.

The activities like organizing Asia Pacific Student Seminar, launching Asia Pacific Student Quality Portal etc would be planned during the project.

The NAAC is working on a proposal to hold a international conference on "Student Participation in Quality Assurance" sometimes during November/December 2006. The current project would provide base to this conference, which is expected to result in concrete move like Bologna or Luxembourg declaration.

Methodology

1. A survey would be conducted involving APQN member agencies about the status of Student Participation Quality Assurance in their respective countries. A questionnaire would attempt to capture data on key indicators. Some of these points are given below:

a) Internal Quality Assurance (HEI)

- Representation of students in decision-making bodies (Academic Committees, Courts, Senates etc.)
- Staff student consultative committees
- Feedback mechanism, both informal and formal; questionnaire – feedback on courses, teachers and campus experience
- Adoption of Student Charter
- Grievance Redressal (Complaint box, committees etc.)

- Student completion surveys
- Alumni representation
- Representation of students in IQAC/QA office

b) External Quality Assurance (Agencies)

- Weightage given to student involvement in internal quality assurance as per the Self-Appraisal Manuals of Quality Assurance Agency.
 - Representation of students in peer review process.
 - Representation of student in Accreditation decision-making body.
 - Importance given to student feedback/interactions during assessment and accreditation process.
 - External Student Satisfaction Surveys and its linking with Accreditation.
 - Alumni feedback in accreditation process.
2. A desk study or survey on similar lines would also be conducted for non-APQN member countries, preferably INQAAHE members.
 3. A study visit and collaborate efforts with experienced bodies like ESIB, Sparqs would be planned besides seminar of stakeholders.
 4. Outcome would be analysed and documented in book as well e-format.
 5. The emerging quality assurance systems would be provided with necessary inputs so that they may have strong student involvement in quality assurance process right from the inception.
 6. Advocacy measures would be taken up with different government agencies for better focus on student involvement in quality assurance.
 7. On the line of ESIB and Sparqs projects, organised initiatives would be encouraged in partnership with HEIs, government and funding agencies.

Deadline

- The initial report of project would be submitted in Shanghai Workshop proposed in March 2006.
- The project to be completed by December 2006.
- Outcome of the project to be submitted by 2007 INQAAHE.
- Based on the feedback the next phase would be commenced later on.