

## Message from the President (2013)

### **Has external QA made an impact? Looking back at the decade of quality assurance**

Today's guest of honor former Minister of Education Dr Ovid Tzeng, Academia Sinica, The Chair of OC, Dr. Victor W. Liu, The President of Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association (TWAEA) , Key Note Speaker Prof Asha Kanwar , APQN Board members, Past Presidents, Vice Presidents and Secretaries of APQN , dear Colleagues of APQN Fraternity , decennial greetings from APQN.



Today as the President of Asia Pacific Quality Network, I stand here to welcome you to be the part of history in making. We have gathered here not only for the annual conference of APQN but also to mark the occasion of 10 years of quality movement in Asia Pacific, fondly called as APQN.

It feels me with tremendous sense of satisfaction on one hand and on the other, it makes me humble with sheer burden of expectations and responsibility that comes with such a massively and openly spread international organization. A wide range of membership that caters to a region with more than half of the world's population and safeguards quality of education in tens of thousands of higher education institutions delivered in over 100 different languages. [My country India alone offers education in more than 24 languages!]

Sheer magnitude of complexity and diversity of cultures and higher education systems make the task of regional network more challenging at the same time more rewarding in terms of great learning from each other.

The main objective of this conference is to reflect on the experience of past 10 years, take stock of impact we have made on sector, make note of key lessons learnt, acknowledge those who contributed to this quality movement and most importantly set an agenda for the next decade in the context of changing canvas of higher education scenario.

### **Impact of EQA in Asia Pacific - Reflections on 10 years of APQN**

About 10 years ago APQN was born with a Mission 'To enhance the quality of higher education in Asia and the Pacific region through strengthening the work of quality assurance agencies and extending the cooperation between them.'

In the past 10 years APQN has grown with its growing QA bodies and advanced the cause stated in its mission.

The purposes of APQN are outlined in constitution as follows.

- to promote good practice in the maintenance and improvement of quality in higher education in the Asia-Pacific region;
- to facilitate research in the region into the practice of quality management in higher education and its effectiveness in improving the quality of higher education in the region;
- to provide advice and expertise to assist the development of new quality assurance agencies in the region;
- to facilitate links between quality assurance agencies and acceptance of each other's decisions and judgments;
- to assist members of APQN to determine standards of institutions operating across national borders;
- to permit better-informed international recognition of qualifications throughout the region;
- to assist in the development and use of credit transfer schemes to enhance the mobility of students between institutions both within and across national borders;
- to enable members of APQN to be alert to dubious accrediting practices and organizations; and
- where appropriate, represent the region and promote the interests of the region, e.g. vis-À-vis other networks and international organizations

Today we gather here on completion of a decade to reflect on where we have reached to meet these purposes.

We have invited almost all key players who contributed to APQN and hope all will join us in reflecting on what we have achieved so far and what we need to focus in the near future.

However, I wish to take opportunity to make a very brief reflection based on my own experience.

APQN has achieved considerable growth in terms of membership, activities and reach. We began with member base of 20 plus organizations, now we boast over 130 plus members that includes about 50 full members. I can proudly say that in last 2 years itself we added 50 new members. If we continue this speed, I am sure APQN will become QA network with highest number of members by 2015 surpassing even INQAAHE, our global big brother. This has not just happened by luck or fluke; we have made it happen with consistent push for membership drive.

APQN was the first network to receive the World Bank Development Grant Fund (DGF) from September 2004 to March 31, 2008. For the 3 and half years till December 2012, it has also been a beneficiary of the Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC) grant administered by UNESCO.

APQN Projects have been successfully implemented with the GIQAC grant including online discussion forums, creation of a database of consultants, developing training material for trainers in quality assurance and the internship programs. There have been over 50 staff exchanges and internships that benefitted more than 20 countries across the region.

The review conducted by UNESCO about the GIQAC projects of APQN acknowledged APQN's leadership role in initiating projects which are then adopted by the other networks. APQN has been making history through its fundamental contributions to many initiatives such as Chiba principles.

Sometimes before a decade, in many systems, quality was implicit in universities. Quality and assurance were both internal [IQA]. QA bodies and networks like APQN contributed to make focus and discourse on quality more explicit by popularizing external quality assurance [EQA].

We have now traversed a full circle when focus is back on internal QA and much discussion occurs on synergy between IQA and EQA. Taking note of this APQN has embraced several HEIs as its institutional members making them partner in our quality movement.

Apart from this, according to me, the most vital contribution made by APQN is creating a sense of brotherhood among the QA fraternity in Asia Pacific. APQN has given us platform where we share and learn from each other.

Through APQN we have a voice of culturally diverse but yet having unifying thread of unique Asian traditions. APQN is now globally respected name when it comes to quality higher education and for each one of us APQN is the ace card to show as our professional identity.

### **Limitations**

Having said that I must admit that, we have many avenues unexplored and many aspirations unfulfilled. Our dependence on external funding for about 9 years have made us kind of weak in terms of financial stability and sustenance. Efforts might have been made but substantial plans of sustainable development of APQN are yet to be realized. We have made beginning in this regard last year and I hope many hands and minds would join APQN to salvage the course.

If we compare ourselves with counterparts like ENQA [or may be CHEA], where network plays a very important role in policy making in higher education, it takes responsibility of QA of its own members through ESG and can afford a well-staffed secretariat with sizable operational budget, then we realize that, we have much distance to travel before we reach there.

If you look at the purposes 6, 7 and 8 which we adopted as part of our constitution in terms mutual recognition of qualifications, credit transfers, student mobility and safeguards against degree and accreditation mills, we are yet to make meaningful beginning. When we plan our next 10 years, I feel we should try to cover this gap by increasing focus on not only QAAs and HEIs but also on the students, who are ultimate beneficiaries of the purpose for which we exist.

### **APQN of My Dreams in next 10 years.**

I believe in dreams as James Allen says, "The greatest achievement was at first and for a time a dream. The oak sleeps in the acorn; the bird waits in the egg; and in the highest vision of the soul a waking angel stirs. Dreams are the seedlings of realities".

I share my dream of APQN with you today.

So far, all activities of APQN had been possible due to financial support of UNESCO and World Bank coupled with voluntary work done by Board members and project leaders. The greatest challenge now is how to sustain this legacy and activities with increased expectations of member agencies with no external funding.

After taking over in this situation, I have convinced the Board to turn the challenge into opportunity and embarked on several initiatives, which have poised APQN as a more vibrant and member friendly network. In the last few months many initiatives have been launched with aim to make APQN self-sustaining and relevant to the needs of stakeholders.

- Collaboration with Australian government for Training of 30 colleagues at Melbourne under EAS capacity building programme.
- MoU with COL, Canada for quality enhancement activities for next 3 years.
- APQN Exchange programme paved way for about 20 experts to visit other QAAs.
- MoU signed with a reputed publishing house to bring out quality publications. 2 publications already released.
- APQN Quality Awards launched for the first time
- Launched Peer review of EQA in Asia Pacific for the first time

A celebration of 10 years of APQN is another initiative which has received hearty response from members. Decennial publication mapping QA in Asia Pacific, Decennial lecture at AACUP, Philippines, International Training workshop by ONESQA , Bangkok in February 2013, conference at Wellington, New Zealand with AQA in May 2013, Workshop on Rankings in Colombo Sri Lanka are among the key activities of 10 year celebrations of APQN.

In light of our experience of decade I wish APQN to set up an ambitious agenda including

- Develop capacity of APQN members for new challenges like QA of OERs and Borderless education
- Development of Asia Pacific Quality Register
- Asia Pacific Quality Information Portal on lines of NARIC
- A joint consortium with and European bodies for Asia- Europe collaboration and exchange.
- APQN QA Certification for assessors and staff in collaboration with leading universities in Asia Pacific.
- Staff Exchange program within and outside region to promote mutual understanding of QA processes.
- APQN Quality label as Regional / international accreditation.
- Development of Quality Hubs across the region to benefit from experienced and resourceful APQN members.
- Taking Forward Chiba principles so as to move towards Asia pacific Higher education quality region.
- Developing APQN's Quality Resource center that will undertake action Research projects and capacity building projects with help of dedicated staff

I know these are all the dreams at the moment. But I believe in what our past President of India Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam says.

**"DREAMS are not those which come while we are sleeping, but dreams are those when you don't sleep before fulfilling them."**

If you look at the initiatives in last few months and program of this conference, you can note a concerted effort on our part to engage with our membership and experts around the world so that this agenda can be fine-tuned and owned by all APQN fraternity. We have invited COL President to guide us on QA of borderless education , experts from UK NARC are here to share recognition experience in Europe, our own experts on outcomes based assessment and External review of QAAs are invited for this decennial conference.

Through this conference discussions and deliberations in AGM, we propose to get the pulse of our members and work on plan of action which is collective wisdom of APQN.

I convey my gratitude to APQN Board and Secretariat for untiring efforts and support to organize this conference and to TWAEA for hosting this historical conference despite many hurdles.

I welcome all of you for this Decennial conference and hope we will be able to set up an agenda for a stronger and brighter APQN in next 10 years keeping in mind fact that what we do is linked with future of millions of students in Asia and pacific.

I conclude with a quote of John Lennon which weaves dream with a hope.

**You may say I'm a dreamer,  
but I'm not the only one,  
I hope someday you'll join us,  
And the world will be as one.**

Wish you a very pleasant APQN conference in its 10th year celebration in this beautiful city of Taipei.

Dr Jagannath Patil

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