



Final Report

APQN Board Directors' Interview on HE Quality during the COVID-19 Crisis

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ABSTRACT

All of a sudden, the COVID-19 crisis has brought the whole world into a painful halt. 1.5 billion students around the world are forced to stay away from schools because of COVID-19. This is simply unprecedented in history. The world is one family. With the endorsement of APQN Board, APQN has conducted a research project entitled "APQN Survey Group of the COVID-19 Impact in Quality of Higher Education" since March 2020. In this part, the research group interviewed the Board Directors on quality of higher education during the COVID-19 crisis from April 20 to May 20, 2020. They are Jianxin Zhang, Galina Motova, Jagannath Patil, I-Jung Grace Lu, Farida Nurmanbetova, Deepthi Bandar and Syun Tutilya.

APQN Board Directors are located in different countries and work in external quality assurance agencies (EQAAs) or Higher education institutions (HEIs). They have their own unique experiences and opinions on the impact of the pandemic on the quality assurance (QA) of higher education. In the interview, they shared their experiences and good practices on "the role and role of Quality Assurance Agencies(QAAs) in quality assurance in higher education", "how to guarantee the quality of online teaching" and "the impact on the internationalization of higher education quality assurance", and put forward their own suggestions on APQN "dissolving boundaries for a quality region" and "devoting to supporting the internal and external quality assurance of higher education in the Asia-Pacific Region".

Based on the interview of the above 6 Board directors and one special guest, the findings are as follows: (1) the role of the QAAs is ensuring internal quality in HEIs; (2) QAAs' has taking measures to guarantee internal QA during online teaching; (3) The COVID-19 Impact on the internationalization of higher education is huge; (4) APQN has taken Actions in Supporting both Internal and External QA in the Asia-Pacific Region.

Key Words: APQN Board Directors' Interview; Quality of Higher Education; the COVID-19 Crisis

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APQN Board Directors' Interview on in Quality of Higher Education during the COVID-19 Crisis

All of a sudden, the COVID-19 crisis has brought the whole world into a painful halt. 1.5 billion students around the world are forced to stay away from schools because of COVID-19. This is simply unprecedented in history. The world is one family. With the endorsement of APQN Board, APQN has conducted a research project entitled "APQN Survey Group of the COVID-19 Impact in Quality of Higher Education" since March 2020. In this part, the research group interviewed the Board Directors on quality of higher education during the COVID-19 crisis from April 20 to May 20, 2020. They are Jianxin Zhang, Galina Motova, Jagannath Patil, I-Jung Grace Lu, Farida Nurmanbetova, Deepthi Bandar and Syun Tutilya (Table 1).

Table 1: List of the Interviewees of APQN Board Directors

Name & APQN position	Country	Organization
 Jianxin Zhang (President)	China	Yunnan Higher Education Evaluation Center (YHEEC)
 Galina Motova (Vice-President)	Russia	National Centre for Public Accreditation (NCPA)
 Jagannath Patil (Board Director)	India	National Institute Academic Degrees Quality Enhancement Higher Education (NIAD-QE)
 I-Jung Grace Lu (Board Director)	Chinese Taipei	Higher Education Evaluation Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT)
 Farida Nurmanbetova (Board Director)	Kazakhstan	Eurasian Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Health Care (ECAQA)
 Deepthi Bandar (Board Director)	Sri Lanka	University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
 Syun Tutilya (Special Guest)	Japan	National Institute Academic Degrees Quality Enhancement Higher Education (NIAD-QE)

APQN Board Directors are located in different countries and work in external quality assurance agencies (EQAAs) or Higher education institutions (HEIs). They have their own unique experiences and opinions on the impact of the pandemic on the

quality assurance (QA) of higher education. In the interview, they shared their experiences and good practices on “the role and role of Quality Assurance Agencies(QAAs) in quality assurance in higher education”, “how to guarantee the quality of online teaching” and “the impact on the internationalization of higher education quality assurance”, and put forward their own suggestions on APQN “dissolving boundaries for a quality region” and “devoting to supporting the internal and external quality assurance of higher education in the Asia-Pacific Region”.

1. Role of the QAAs in Ensuring Internal Quality in HEIs

Affected by COVID-19, HEIs have moved from traditional education to distance learning. This is both an opportunity and a challenge for HEIs.

1.1 HE Quality is Combined with both internal QA and external QA

As an EQAA, APQN has been keeping close contact with HEIs. APQN believes that in the context of COVID-19, QAAs should further strengthen cooperation with HEIs. Quality of Higher education is combined with both internal QA from the HEIs and external QA from QAAs. It is in the best interest of university leadership and external regulators overseeing their performance to realize quality as the only knight in shining armor that can protect and nurture the dyadic relationships between graduates and their alma mater (Jianxin Zhang). The QAAs should cooperate with HEIs in order to identify and address current needs and analyze the COVID-19 impact (Farida Nurmanbetova).

1.2 Developing the Role of External QAAs to Support HEIs

internal QA from the HEIs and external QA from QAAs have always assumed different responsibilities for quality assurance and jointly maintained and improved the quality of education. In the context of COVID-19, HEIs is facing great challenges. APQN believes that external QAAs should help and support HEIs with their unique advantages and characteristics.

1.2.1 The Promoters of the Change of Quality Concept

In the past, we said “external QA as the leading role and internal QA as the main body” over and over again, but frankly speaking we did not make it real happen. Today, for the first time, external QAAs cannot conduct site visit, neither site review, nor other site QA activities, we have to promote the real change of this quality

concept. Today, we finally realize that the principle of dialectical materialism is right: “the external cause is only the condition of change, while the internal cause is the key to change.” We all know that no matter how hard we try to hatch, stones can never become chickens, but only eggs can become chickens. external QA must promote the quality concept of internal QA is the foundation stone in the long journey of seeking excellent quality(Jianxin Zhang)

1.2.2 The Participants of Quality Management and Standard Setters

As an EQAA, APQN believes that the relevant responsibilities of external QA from QAAs should be further clarified in the current period.

1) Quality standard setters

Before Corona virus, universities adopted a single method: traditional “face-to-face teaching”; during Corona virus, universities have to adopt “online teaching”; after Corona virus or at “post crisis era”, teaching model is not a “single choice” of online or offline teaching, but a blending teaching, including both online and face-to-face teaching. Similarly, external QAAs must adopt a blending evaluation model. We must reform a series of blueprints, plans, concepts, contents, methods, technologies, standards and others. For example, six criteria should be adopted to evaluate online teaching: 1) teachers’ course rate; 2) students’ attendance rate; 3) teacher-students’ communication and interaction rate; 4) teaching satisfaction; 5) learning satisfaction; and 6) administration effectiveness (Jianxin Zhang).

At present, the emergency response measures of HEIs around the world are not satisfactory. We have to admit that QAAs are not really ready for this great change.

2) The participants of quality management

During online teaching, teachers’ control of the teaching process directly through homework, daily quiz, examinations and other ways, has been greatly reduced. Such educational and teaching management system as constraints and limitations on students’ home-based learning, has been immensely cut down. “Face-to-face management” has become “back-to-back management”. How to ensure teaching quality? external QAAs must be the participants of quality management in 3 major tasks: (1) evaluate and approve standards and technical specifications of online courses, such as discipline, academic and professional specifications; (2) put forward the suggestions and opinions on the construction of online teaching platform, such as Internet access, interface requirements, etc.; (3) organize consultants and experts to conduct consulting services, such as guideline of network communication, IT teaching design, etc.. Since April, APQN has conducted two online surveys: one for universities, the other for QAAs in the globe. Please help to fill in the survey (Jianxin Zhang).

1.3 Providing Relevant Information and Guidelines to Support HEIs

As a quality standard setter and the participant of quality management, EQAAs should support HEIs with their special status and functions.

1.3.1 Setting Guidelines to Respond to the Pandemic

At present, the response mechanism of colleges and universities around the world is not satisfactory. Few HEIs are fully prepared for the COVID-19 Crisis, and there is no relevant experience to deal with the COVID-19 Crisis at present. EQAAs have made use of their advantages and functions to develop relevant guidelines for responding to the epidemic: 1) Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in distance learning and academic integrity. 2) The guidelines for monitoring of implementation distance learning (Farida Nurmanbetova). 3) Future research should be conducted in order to understand the challenges and issues the HEIs and QA agencies may face and also develop relevant guidelines, methods, and support for the HEIs (I-Jung Grace Lu)

1.3.2 Developing a Methodology of QA of Online Learning

QAAs offers a wide range of educational courses in the webinar format for the HEI management and academic departments covering the issues of the development of internal quality assurance systems, designing new educational programmes and developing new assessment methods of student learning outcomes. The webinars are accessible in the off-line mode for the convenience of users. Should the pandemic situation stay for a long period of time QAAs is planning to develop a methodology of quality evaluation of study programmes online and offer it to HEIs as a component of their internal quality assurance system (Galina Motova)

1.3.3 Providing Information Support and Realizing Resource Sharing

At this difficult time a challenging task for QAAs is not to overburden HEIs with ensuring the quality of education delivery but to support them with providing relevant information and knowledge about best practices. 1) QAAs is carrying out the search for information and monitoring of the mass media about the current situation in HEIs, undertakes and publishes thematic analysis. QAAs is following all regulatory documents issued by the Government, the Ministry of Education and other governing bodies and duly informs the HEI community through social networks (special educational resources have been set up for this purpose in Telegram and

Facebook)(Galina Motova). 2) QAAs form an emergency group in responding to the outbreak and supervise the operation of QAAs in advance of the potential outbreak, in order to make sure that the operation of the QA process remains with high quality. 3)We also need to increase the usage of online conference meetings through Zoom and Webex in terms of having discussions with the universities and the reviewers to reduce the risk of traveling. Presentations of the accreditation processes and guidelines of different QA projects are also well prepared and are ready to be shared with the HEIs and reviewers, even the public through the internet(I-Jung Grace Lu)

1.4 Encouraging and Improving Online Learning

Currently HEIs are facing unprecedented challenges as a result of the COVID-19 crisis outbreak globally. Most of the traditional assessment systems based on paper have also been gradually replaced by a more modern system based on an online system. The HEIs also follows this pattern of using fewer paper documents and material in their courses. Thus, when it comes to organizing and distributing the information through an online system, most of the HEIs should be ready (I-Jung Grace Lu). 1)In the short term, quality assurance procedure will have to endorse the quality of the learning outcomes expected from the students' experiences in the COCOVID-19 circumstances as equivalent with or superior to those in the past times. 2)We believe the online teaching and learning will in principle enhance students' opportunities for learning and empower teachers to teach in a wider variety of methods (Jagannath Patil). 3) During the review process, the reviewers are encouraged to ask about how the HEIs use their online system and also to examine the students' feedback system. It is crucial to have a strong feedback system to monitor the learning of the students(I-Jung Grace Lu)

2. Taking Measures to Guarantee Internal QA during Online

Teaching

As country after country decrees partial or total lock downs from the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of HEIs closing and switching to e-learning has soared. However, few of these HEIs are well prepared for this sudden, disruptive move. The resilience of modern universities has never been tested as thoroughly as during the current crisis. A lot of scrambling and improvisation are occurring as administrators, instructors and students struggle to implement broad-based online learning. The scale of the COVID-19 outbreak is unprecedented in the lives of nearly everyone involved(Jianxin Zhang)

2.1 Standards for High-quality Online Teaching

The internal quality assurance mechanisms in distance learning at the HEIs should meet the same requirements of traditional education as well as some additional requirements to ensure the faculty training, course instruction and links to clear descriptions of the technical support offered and how to obtain it (Farida Nurmanbetova) Experience has shown that quality online learning requires that the teaching material is prepared by a professional instructional designer, that the lecturer is pedagogically trained for delivering the programme and the students are equally exposed to the pedagogy of online learning (Jianxin Zhang)

2.2 Important Considerations for HEIs

As for the HEIs struggling with the sudden shift to online education, some considerations are urgently important for institutions engaged in this transition. :

2.2.1 Developing New Learning-assessment Procedures and Criteria

Aligning learning-assessment procedures and criteria with the new online curricular and pedagogical approaches. Some HEIs have already moved to a pass/fail approach, eliminating grades for the rest of this academic year. Designing online assessment methods to fit these emerging modes of teaching and learning will take significant effort, but it will help to assure the quality of learning and validity of final assessments (Jianxin zhang)

2.2.2 Increasing Academic and Psychological Support for Students

This effort will become ever more crucial as growing numbers of students struggle to adjust to new teaching and learning approaches – not to mention their fears and concerns about the pandemic. Careful reliance on data and predictive analytics can help support staff identify struggling students early on and can also help pinpoint the areas in which these students might require extra support.

2.2.3 Factoring COVID-19 Crisis into Strategic Planning

All HEIs must factor this crisis into their strategic planning, undertaking thorough risk assessments and mitigation processes to anticipate the medium- and long-term consequences of the pandemic – including the expected economic recession (Jianxin Zhang) In the long term, those ad hoc measures to cope with the sudden emergence of the situation will have be reevaluated and incorporated in the QAA's standards and review procedures (Syun Tutilya)

2.2.4 Developing Multimedia Technologies to Acquire Practical Skills

Online teaching and learning cannot fully replace traditional forms of education, which involve practice and laboratory classes. A longer period of quarantine will call for developing multimedia technologies for acquiring certain practical skills and will expand the share of student independent work (Galina Motova)

2.3 Measures to Ensure the Quality of Online Teaching

1) Establish the status of online teaching: In long run increased use of online learning may be cost effective for both learners and institutions. So initial investments would be worth future benefits. Off course if government can fund or subsidize for cheaper connectivity, it would boost the process (Deepthi Bandara)

2) Improve infrastructure: HEIs must make sure it has the infrastructure in place to conduct online teaching/learning (Deepthi Bandara)

3) What the country should do: Initial indications show the following types of measures are needed at the national level: 1) financial stimulus packages and student loan moratoria, 2) flexibility in quality assurance requirements and 3) capacity-building initiatives to ease the transition to online learning (Jianxin Zhang)

4) What the HEI should do:

(1) Teachers: HEIs need to figure out how many teachers are conducting online activities at present and how successful they are. This group needs to be given support to continue. HEI has to ensure all teachers are able to go online at a certain time. HEIs should introduce methods of ensuring that tutors trained and skilled to deliver support to students effectively.

(2) Students: For those who are lagging in online teaching activities, much support should be given in training them as quickly as possible - by hands on training opportunities. It also has to make sure that students can access online activity. Some measure has to be taken for all students to be involved and engaged in online activities. Periodic surveys would have to be conducted by the HEI to make sure that students are learning and whether the level of learning is satisfactory (Deepthi Bandara). HEIs could also consider setting up a 24-hour helpline for students in order to give them adequate advice and reassurance during this difficult time. HEIs should provide academic support services and resources that can help student succeed in the online course (Farida Nurmanbetova). HEIs would need to setup pedagogy and technology innovation units, if they don't have it already (Jagannath Patil)

(3) Administrative staff: Apart from the teachers and students, immediate training should be done for the administrative staff to go online as much of these activities are halted at present slowing down administrative procedures significantly. It is necessary that HEIs communicate with connectivity vendors in procuring connection at subsidized rates for the students and staff (Deepthi Bandara)

4) What the external QAAs should do: Even now in order to motivate students

and enhance the quality of teaching new interactive forms of content delivery are being developed. New assessment methods using multimedia technologies and various forms of getting feedback, such as proctoring technologies, are being tested (Galina Motova). Strengthen academic and student support services by increasing efficiency and transparency (Jagannath Patil)

3. The COVID-19 Impact on HE Internationalization

The outbreak of COVID-19 has brought unprecedented obstacles to higher education—as well as the internationalization of higher education QA around the world. Universities have been closed, with teaching and conference canceled or put online in many countries. The overseas educational journeys of teachers and students have been affected to varying degrees. International human movement has been greatly suppressed. Academic networking and changing international educational interaction have become unstoppable trends these days. How to promote the international QA of higher education has also become an important issue.

3.1 Reducing Mobility of Global Personnel

Before COVID-19 struck, around five million students were undertaking degrees outside their home country. Now thousands of students who returned or began studying abroad have been affected by the epidemic. The figures released on 14 April by Study portals, the Dutch-based global study choice platform, show that 40% of potential international students responding to their latest survey said they were changing their plans.

For 20 years, China has been one of the largest exporters of international students. However, English proficiency examinations such as IELTS, GRE or GMAT for Chinese students to apply to foreign universities have been canceled nationwide under the COVID-19 Impact outbreak. There is likely to be a significant temporary decline and longer-term, more modest decrease, although China will remain the largest single sending country for the foreseeable future (Jianxin Zhang). Parents would think twice in sending their children overseas for education for a while - at least till some kind of normalcy returns in the world in Sri Lanka (Deepthi Bandara). Similarly, it is highly likely that this year will see a critically low admission of foreign students in Russian HEIs and there will be fewer outgoing Russian students. Even those students who are currently studying in Russia can postpone their education or even give it up (Galina Motova).

On the other hand, this is also a big challenge for the cooperation of teachers, implementing joint projects, exchange visits and conferences. For example, faculty members have been asked not to travel to infected countries, or to avoid foreign travel. It's no doubt that mobility of global personnel will reduce for a year or so.

3.2 More Diversified International Educational Interaction

As a result of travel restrictions and social isolation measures, international education exchanges and cooperation have been hampered. APQN has canceled and rescheduled APQN academic Conference, Global Summit and AGM. Many international congress and overseas projects have also been affected in the rest of the world.

Nevertheless, thanks to technology, international interactions, and cooperation between QAAs around the world still carry on. Several international events of Higher Education Evaluation Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT), important QAAs' conferences and networking events have also been canceled or postponed due to the outbreak of the COVID-19, but HEEACT kept in touch with several QAAs and invite them to participate in future academic events(I-Jung Grace Lu.)

We have been made so aware of the future of digital communication over the Internet due to COVID-19. International education is closely linked to network technology and online system. So we may be able to envision a more diversified set of ways of educational interaction across borders in the future(Syun Tutiya)

3.3 Taking Measures to Promote the International QA of Higher Education

During the fight against the epidemic, large-scale online courses have played a huge role. If the pandemic stays for a long time various forms of distance international cooperation are bound to develop: open online courses, online platforms for communication of students and teachers, information resources, social networks, etc. However, online communication cannot fully replace face to face interaction. While online teaching would be an inevitable alternative to survive, how to guarantee the quality of online courses and promote the international quality assurance of higher education has become a problem that cannot be ignored.

3.3.1 Strengthening the QA of Online Courses

It is not hard to foresee that better QA models and mechanisms developed for the online courses and micro-credential after the COVID-19 pandemic passes. The EQAAs need to develop online materials and resources for the HEIs to support their QA mechanisms. Besides, the EQAAs need to develop online materials and resources to support the faculty, students, and stakeholders, and also develop guidelines to support the HEIs in their transition to online learning (I-Jung Grace Lu)

3.3.2 Promoting Localization and Internationalization of Education

The outbreak of COVID-19 exposed the excessive financial dependence of some universities on international students. The crisis might signal that seeing international education mainly as an income generator is undesirable from many viewpoints. It is important for higher education to learn from this pandemic how to achieve a healthy balance between globalized and localized economies. Academic work must be globally connected, but in a sustainable way(Jianxin Zhang)

3.3.3 Enhancing Cooperation between QAAs

In order to ensure the quality of educational content at the international level we need even tighter cooperation (bilateral and networking) between accreditation agencies. The main issue here is trust to HEIs and organizations developing online courses and trust in the work of accreditation agencies that ensure their quality(Galina Motova) QAAs and networks should hold a conference focusing on the application of educational technology and the QA model for online education.

In addition, a few innovative international quality assurance practices would have to be worked out to ensure the quality of higher education in the future - this might be an area the APQN Board can work on collectively(Deepthi Bandara)

4. APQN's Actions in Supporting both Internal and External QA in the APR

As a regional organization of higher education quality assurance, APQN serves as a bridge to improve the quality of higher education in the APR. during the Covid-19 crisis, APQN did and is conducting many activities to realize its goal of “Dissolving Boundaries for a Quality Region” and “to be committed to the quality of higher education and is supportive of both internal and external quality assurance in the APR” And there is also a lot of work and activity to be done.

4.1 Forming an Online Support Network

In the conditions of student and teacher self-isolation, isolation of whole counties, APQN could form an online support network for all QAAs in sharing their challenges and experiences with each other, such as choosing online technologies of teaching, assessing and recommending open online courses, methods of evaluating online study programmes, which could promote good practices of response of QAAs during COVID-19 crisis(Galina Motova, I-Jung Grace Lu and Jagannath Patil)

4.1.1 Conducting the Research on the COVID-19 Impact on HE and QA System

In order to strengthen communication and communication between regions and assurance the quality of higher education, APQN has conducted the research on the COVID-19 Impact on HEIs and QA systems : 1. APQN Survey of the COVID-19 Impact at Higher Education Institutions(HEIs) at <https://www.wjx.cn/jq/66391561.aspx>. 2.APQN Survey to QAAs at <https://www.surveycake.com/s/DlOnD>. 3. Interview with APQN Board Directors during Covid-19 (Jianxin Zhang)

4.1.2 Organizing and Participating in Online Seminars

To further facilitate the flexibility of online support networking platforms, we can also set up a social network for APQN members on the example of ENQA <https://twitter.com/ENQAtwt/status/1243124403455623170>. We might also find useful organizing some webinars for informing APQN members on the situation in different countries, for example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jldaWYcOYt8&feature=youtu.be> and online conferences, for example, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ivDPjEt-LA&feature=youtu.be> (Galina Motova) Furthermore, similar activities can be done for institutional members focused on internal QA(Jagannath Patil)

In addition, professor Zhang attended an international seminar on behalf of APQN to enhance international communication, including CHEA/CIQG Webinar on Sustaining and Enhancing Institutional Autonomy: The Role of Quality Assurance on April 16, 2020; UNESCO's COVID-19 Educational Response Webinar 4 on Managing high-stakes exams and assessments during the Covid-19 crisis on 9 April 2020 and CCG Webinar on How is COVID-19 impacting international education on April 17, 2020.

Both online seminars organized by the APQN itself and other international conferences are effective at breaking regional boundaries and help to support internal and external quality assurance during the pandemic.

4.2 Providing Short-term and Long-term Guidance to APQN Members

So far, the epidemic has resulted in the suspension and termination of quality assessment, which has been greatly challenged and affected by the work of higher education institutions and quality assurance institutions, such as financial difficulties, online quality assessment and so on. As a solution to the current problems, the

APQN directors made their own suggestions.

4.2.1 Providing Financial Support

The reduction of fees in consultation or even free consultation through the online platform could also be provided to support the QAAs who are members of APQN. Even some of the financial support shall be provided to the QAAs if they are really greatly impacted by the pandemic, such as the reduction of membership fees. The relevant guideline shall also be provided in order to guide them through the time of crisis in supporting their HEIs(I-Jung Grace Lu).

4.2.2 Manuals on Distance Learning

APQN should consider the development of manuals for course conversion from traditional to distance learning, including assessments and teaching methods, and programme evaluation. It would be helpful for HEIs for revision of organizational transformation and improve strategies related to distance learning. It could also be beneficial to establish contact with HEIs in order to identify their current challenges and involve APQN in their solutions, where possible(Farida Nurmanbetova).

4.2.3 Drawing Up Key Quality Parameters

APQN can draw up key quality parameters (about 10) that would be valid for all in the Asia Pacific region. For each parameter draw up the states it can be in when ensuring quality. e.g. Connectivity to go online - a. very good, b. good c. satisfactory d. poor. Work out what should be done to bring the HEIs to the acceptable quality standard. Some communication would be necessary with the HEIs concerned. Provide advice of possible options to realize the identified quality standard. Assist in providing the possible option - advice, financing, making connection with the right parties Monitor progress and troubleshoot Once quality standard is reached – certify (Deepthi Bandara)..

As quality-assurance workers in higher education, APQN directors have made many efforts to reduce the impact of the outbreak of COVID-19, and their views and practices have brought new perspectives and directions to the quality assurance of higher education and APQN. The challenges posed by COVID-19 will eventually be solved and the future of higher education quality assurance will also face new problems and difficulties, but the soldiers will fight fire with water. APQN and higher education quality assurance workers will continue to strive to support the quality assurance of higher education in the APR and even the world.

Appendix 1: APQN Interview on Quality of Higher Education

Dear APQN Board Directors

Greeting from APQN Survey Team of the Influence of COVID-19 in Quality of Higher Education!

In no time, the COVID-19 crisis has brought the whole world to a painful halt. 1.5 billion students around the world are forced to stay away from schools because of COVID-19. This is simply unprecedented in history.

The world is one family. With the endorsement of the APQN Board, APQN has conducted a project entitled "APQN Survey of the Influence of COVID-19 in Quality of Higher Education" since last month...

Here, the APQN Survey Team would like to interview each of the Board Director. We will summarize the opinions of each director into an interview article and publish it on APQNnews (No. 21).

You are expected to send us your answers to the following 4 questions within 7 days (before April 28, 2020), attaching one of your recent photos.

Thank you very much for your support!

Dear APQN Board Directors, let's call for responsibility and solidarity, let's fight against the COVID-19 Crisis for a better tomorrow!

APQN Survey Team of the Influence of COVID-19 in Quality of Higher Education
April 20, 2020

Interview on in Quality of Higher Education with APQN Board Directors during the COVID-19 Crisis			
Your Name		Your organization	
APQN Position		Country	
<p><u>1. As an external quality assurance agency (QAA) during the COVID-19 Crisis, what role do you think your QAA plays in ensuring the internal quality of higher education institutions (HEIs)?</u></p> <p>Reference sub-topics: (1) How has your QAA worked with HEIs to focus on quality in curriculum, grading practices, an award of credits and others? (2) What is your QAA doing to address concerns about the potential for growth in academic corruption as online teaching and learning expand? (3) What are the differences between the role of quality assurance if the current crisis is short-term vs. long-term? (4) What kind of quality assurance support has your QAA provided to HEIs?</p> <p>Your Reply:</p>			

2. During the COVID-19 Crisis, the HEIs around the world have begun online teaching. How do you think the internal quality of the HEIs should be guaranteed?

Reference sub-topics: (1) Please recommend what types of interactive delivery of online teaching and learning; (2) Can you describe developed curriculum as well as grading practices, both short-term and longer-term? (3) How shall the HEIs do to get adequate financial support? (4) How shall the HEIs provide training and technology for faculty and staff? (5) How shall the HEIs provide effective student support and academic support services?

Your Reply:

3. In your opinion, what influence has the COVID-19 Crisis caused to the internationalization of higher education quality assurance?

Reference sub-topics: (1) How has COVID-19 disrupted current and prospective overseas educational journeys, such as campus study, recruitment and admission practices? (2) How has COVID-19 eroded confidence in the future of international education? (3) The necessity of increased online learning options can no longer be denied. Will a wider role for virtual learning strengthen or weaken the architecture of the international education industry? (4) What measures should we take to promote the international quality assurance of higher education in the future?

Your Reply:

4. During the COVID-19 Crisis, what do you think APQN should do to realize its goal of “Dissolving Boundaries for a Quality Region” and “to be committed to the quality of higher education and is supportive of both internal and external quality assurance in the Asia-Pacific Region”?

Your Reply:

Go Go APQN! Go Go the Whole World!

Appendix 2: Interview Records of APQN Board Directors

Jianxin Zhang

Interview on in Quality of Higher Education with APQN Board Directors during the COVID-19 Crisis			
Your Name	Jianxin Zhang	Your organization	Yunnan Higher Education Evaluation Center (YHEEC)
APQN Position	President	Country	China
<p><u>1. As an external QAAs (QAA) during the COVID-19 Crisis, what role do you think your QAAs plays in ensuring the internal quality of higher education institutions (HEIs)?</u></p> <p>Quality of Higher education is combined with both internal QA from the HEIs and external QA from QAAs. It is in the best interest of university leadership and external regulators overseeing their performance to realize quality as the only knight in shining armor that can protect and nurture the dyadic relationships between graduates and their alma mater.</p> <p>It is a fallacy to believe that online learning can be effective by merely posting a lecturer's notes online or having a video recording of the lecture. Yet, this is what is generally happening at present. Experience has shown that quality online learning requires that the teaching material is prepared by a professional instructional designer, that the lecturer is pedagogically trained for delivering the programme and the students are equally exposed to the pedagogy of online learning.</p> <p>Likewise, HEIs, dimensions of quality are also multidimensional and equivocal. The most important dimension is the quality of graduates that a university is producing since the beginning of 21 Century. The quality of graduates is the aftermath of (1) quality in instructions, (2) quality of curriculum and (3) quality in assessments on program learning outcomes (PLOs), course learning outcomes (CLOs) and designing assessment rubrics in line with this mapping ensures quality and university's commitment in honing the technical, soft and life skills of its graduates.. The compromised approach in student assessment is wrongdoing, which needs the action of external QAAs.</p> <p>Then where are the actions of external QAAs to evaluate the elements mentioned above?</p> <p>COVID makes us have to admit that so-called "omnipotent" human beings are so small and so helpless at the public health emergencies. 90% of students in 188 countries are forced to stay away from schools because of a little corona virus. "This is simply un-precedent in history." Online teaching is the immediate action of universities to fight against Corona virus. Just like Domino effect- a cumulative effect produced when one event initiates a succession of similar events, online teaching initiated a</p>			

succession of changes on teaching and learning for teachers and students, re-organization of educational resources, change of educational concepts, change of venues, change of teaching methodology, etc. the most obvious change is quality assurance in many ways. We have to admit that QAAs are not really ready for this great change. "APQN survey of the COVID-19 Impact in QAAs" shows that over 90% of QAAs has stopped or postponed site visits, site reviews, because of corona virus. I think, at this moment, QAAs have roles to play:

1. QAAs must be the promoters of the change of quality concept. In the past, we said "external QA as the leading role and internal QA as the main body" over and over again, but frankly speaking we did not make it real happen. Today, for the first time, external QAAs cannot conduct site visit, neither site review, nor other site QA activities, we have to promote the real change of this quality concept. Today, we finally realize that the principle of dialectical materialism is right: "the external cause is only the condition of change, while the internal cause is the key to change." We all know that no matter how hard we try to hatch, stones can never become chickens, but only eggs can become chickens. external QA must promote the quality concept of internal QA is the foundation stone in the long journey of seeking excellent quality.

2. QAAs must be quality standard setters. Before Corona virus, universities adopted a single method: traditional "face-to-face teaching"; during Corona virus, universities have to adopt "online teaching"; after Corona virus or at "post crisis era", teaching model is not a "single choice" of online or offline teaching, but a blending teaching, including both online and face-to-face teaching. Similarly, external QAAs must adopt a blending evaluation model. We must reform a series of blueprints, plans, concepts, contents, methods, technologies, standards and others. For example, six criteria should be adopted to evaluate online teaching: 1) teachers' course rate; 2) students' attendance rate; 3) teacher-students' communication and interaction rate; 4) teaching satisfaction; 5) learning satisfaction; and 6) administration effectiveness.

3. QAAs must be the participants of quality management. During online teaching, teachers' control of the teaching process directly through homework, daily quiz, examinations and other ways, has been greatly reduced. Such educational and teaching management system as constraints and limitations on students' home-based learning, has been immensely cut down. "Face-to-face management" has become "back-to-back management". How to ensure teaching quality? external QAAs must be the participants of quality management in 3 major tasks: 1) evaluate and approve standards and technical specifications of online courses, such as discipline, academic and professional specifications; 2) put forward the suggestions and opinions on the construction of online teaching platform, such as Internet access, interface requirements, etc.; 3) organize consultants and experts to conduct consulting services, such as guideline of network communication, IT teaching design, etc.. Since April, APQN has conducted two online surveys: one for universities, the other for QAAs in the globe. Please help to fill in the survey.

As President of APQN, whose members are made up of both external QA and internal QA, I deeply believe that during Corona virus, external QAAs need to reflect and self-examine the picky, bossy and even arrogant traditional evaluation behaviors;

QAAs need to deeply understand the role of quality promoters, quality standard setters and participants of quality management; QAAs need to work closely together with internal QAAs at universities, in order to reform quality assurance both internal and external, to make contribution to improving education quality, and “dissolving boundaries for a quality region” at this “Post Crisis Era”.

2. During the COVID-19 Crisis, the HEIs around the world have begun online teaching. How do you think the internal quality of the HEIs should be guaranteed?

As country after country decrees partial or total lockdowns from the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of HESs closing and switching to e-learning has soared. However, few of these HEIs are well prepared for this sudden, disruptive move. The resilience of modern universities has never been tested as thoroughly as during the current crisis.

A lot of scrambling and improvisation are occurring as administrators, instructors and students struggle to implement broad-based online learning. The scale of the COVID-19 outbreak is unprecedented in the lives of nearly everyone involved.

It is difficult, at this early stage of the pandemic, to have a comprehensive view of national programmes adopted by governments to support affected HEIs. Initial indications show the following types of measures are needed at the national level: 1) financial stimulus packages and student loan moratoria, 2) flexibility in quality assurance requirements and 3) capacity-building initiatives to ease the transition to online learning.

The abrupt, broad-based transition to online education provoked by the pandemic has been a boon for education technology companies, a few of which have shamelessly taken advantage of the crisis to boost their prices or dump flawed products on the market. Fortunately, these companies appear to be a small minority. Many firms, from the education sector and beyond, have shown boundless generosity in support of the thousands of institutions and millions of students left stranded by the pandemic.

As for the HEIs struggling with the sudden shift to online education, three considerations are urgently important for institutions engaged in this transition.

First, they must align learning-assessment procedures and criteria with the new online curricular and pedagogical approaches. Some HEIs have already moved to a pass/fail approach, eliminating grades for the rest of this academic year. Designing online assessment methods to fit these emerging modes of teaching and learning will take significant effort, but it will help to assure the quality of learning and validity of final assessments.

Second, HEIs must establish, increase or strengthen academic and psychological support for today's students. This effort will become ever more crucial as growing numbers of students struggle to adjust to new teaching and learning approaches – not to mention their fears and concerns about the pandemic. Careful reliance on data and predictive analytics can help support staff identify struggling students early on and can also help pinpoint the areas in which these students might require extra support.

Third, all HEIs must factor this crisis into their strategic planning, undertaking thorough risk assessments and mitigation processes to anticipate the medium- and long-term consequences of the pandemic – including the expected economic

recession.

3. In your opinion, what Impact has the COVID-19 Crisis caused to internationalization of higher education quality assurance?

The coronavirus crisis is upending higher education – as well as economies and the lives of millions of individuals around the world. Universities have been closed, with teaching cancelled or put online. Conferences have been called off.

Of direct relevance to international higher education, prospective students have been unable to take examinations, and international students have been unable to travel to their campuses or to return home. Study abroad programmes have been cancelled. Faculty members have been asked not to travel to infected countries – or to avoid foreign travel entirely.

As the coronavirus keeps much of the world's population confined to self-quarantined spaces and observing the rules of social distancing, fears of a massive recession, increased global insularity, scapegoating and xenophobia all contribute to interpersonal as well as collective anxieties.

Many of our campuses are temporarily closed and teaching and meetings have moved online. APQN has cancelled and rescheduled APQN academic Conference, Global Summit, AGM and is struggling with how to respond pragmatically to this uncertainty. As international educators they are away from our campuses and our students, which leaves us to ponder what major and minor impacts this pandemic may have on their profession and practice, both in the immediate and the longer term.

There will hardly be any disruption to internationalization as we have known it and only a temporary decrease and slight restriction of traditional student mobility patterns.

1. The impact on study abroad

A growing number of prospective international students are considering changing their study abroad plans, a figure that is rising as more countries introduce tighter lockdowns to tackle the spread and rising death toll from the coronavirus. The figures released on 14 April by Study portals, the Dutch-based global study choice platform, show that 40% of potential international students responding to their latest survey said they were changing their plans.

China's international education industry is one of the sectors most affected by the coronavirus outbreak, according to a survey by the Beijing Overseas Study Service Association.

In China, the Ministry of Education announced on 27 January that English proficiency examinations for Chinese students to apply to foreign universities would be cancelled nationwide during February. The exams include the International English Language Testing System or IELTS, the Test of English as a Foreign Language or TOEFL, the Graduate Record Examination or GRE, and the Graduate Management Admission Test or GMAT.

Thousands of students engaged in carefully planned, semester-long or shorter study

abroad programmes have been called home. While temporarily problematic from many perspectives, it is unlikely that these programmes will suffer long-term declines.

2. Mobility

Without question, there will be a decrease in mobility for a year or so, with declines in global student mobility and with particular implications for the number of students coming from China to the rest of the world.

This temporary decline accompanies an end to the Chinese student boom of the past two decades. Thus, there is likely to be a significant temporary decline and longer-term, more modest decrease, although China will remain the largest single sending country for the foreseeable future.

As international student enrolment patterns shifted over time, the term 'study abroad' was gradually replaced by the term 'education abroad' to encompass other modalities, such as undergraduate research abroad, global service-learning and international internships.

3. Financial dependence on international students

Some receiving countries, most notably Australia and to a lesser extent the United Kingdom, and some less prestigious colleges and universities in the United States have become dependent on international student tuition fees as an important part of their financial survival.

After all, international education is an estimated US\$300 billion dollar industry globally. The coronavirus crisis shows that this dependence is deeply problematic: it is likely that institutions dependent on this income will face significant problems.

The crisis might signal that seeing international education mainly as an income generator is undesirable from many viewpoints, but one has to fear it will not. Indeed, governments and academic institutions may double down on their recruitment efforts.

4. Balanced globalization

Student mobility has reduced and national protectionism has increased as a result of the pandemic. Pre-COVID-19 globalization was vulnerable because of its interconnectivity. Travel and trade restrictions show that we cannot solely depend on a global economy; we also need local and regional supply chains. On the other hand, the cyber world and internet connectivity offer ways of adapting quickly to new situations.

Let's learn from this pandemic how to achieve a healthy balance between globalized and localized economies. Academic work must be globally connected, but in a sustainable way. The pandemic also confirms the key role of multilateral institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO), but also multilateral academic institutions and networks.

4. During the COVID-19 Crisis, what do you think APQN should do to realize its goal of "Dissolving Boundaries for a Quality Region" and "to be committed to the quality of higher education and is supportive of both internal and external quality assurance in the AQR"?

COVID-19 will leave no sector in any country in the world unaffected, and its

consequences will be felt for years to come.

During the Covid-19, APQN did and is conducting the following activities to realize its goal of “Dissolving Boundaries for a Quality Region” and “to be committed to the quality of higher education and is supportive of both internal and external quality assurance in the AQR”:

1. APQN Survey of the COVID-19 Impact at Higher Education Institutions(HEIs) at <https://www.wjx.cn/jq/66391561.aspx>.

2. APQN Survey to QAAs at <https://www.surveycake.com/s/DIOND>

3. Attending: (1) CHEA/CIQG Webinar on Sustaining and Enhancing Institutional Autonomy: The Role of Quality Assurance on April 16, 2020; (2) UNESCO’s COVID-19 Educational Response Webinar 4 on Managing high-stakes exams and assessments during the Covid-19 pandemic on 9 April 2020; (3) CCG Webinar on How is COVID-19 impacting international education on April 17, 2020.

4. Interview with APQN Board Directors during Covid-19

Galina Motova

Interview on in Quality of Higher Education with APQN Board Directors during the COVID-19 Crisis			
Your Name	Galina Motova	Your organization	National Centre for Public Accreditation
APQN Position	Deputy Director	Country	Russia

1. As an external QAAs (QAA) during the COVID-19Crisis, what role do you think your QAAs plays in ensuring the internal quality of higher education institutions (HEIs)?

In Russia as well as in the whole world the HEIs' main task in the conditions of coronavirus pandemic is to preserve the teaching and learning process and motivation of students to keep acquiring the curriculum. All Russia's HEIs in an unprecedented short time (during a week) had to change their teaching methods and start distance teaching of students; though, with different levels of the content quality and education technology. It will take time to set up a stable quality online work with students. At this difficult time a challenging task for QAAs is not to overburden HEIs with ensuring the quality of education delivery but to support them with providing relevant information and knowledge about best practices. QAAs is carrying out the search for information and monitoring of the mass media about the current situation in Russian HEIs and abroad, undertakes and publishes thematic analysis. QAAs is following all regulatory documents issued by the Government, the Ministry of Education and other governing bodies and duly informs the HE community through social networks (special educational resources have been set up for this purpose in Telegram and Facebook). QAAs offers a wide range of educational courses in the webinar format for the HEI management and academic departments covering the issues of the development of internal quality assurance systems, designing new educational programmes and developing new assessment methods of student leaning outcomes. The webinars are accessible in the off-line mode for the convenience of users. Should the pandemic situation stay for a long period of time QAAs is planning to develop a methodology of quality evaluation of study programmes online and offer it to HEIs as a component of their internal quality assurance system.

2. During the COVID-19 Crisis, the HEIs around the world have begun online teaching. How do you think the internal quality of the HEIs should be guaranteed?

In my view, online teaching and learning cannot fully replace traditional forms of education, which involve practice and laboratory classes. On the other hand, online teaching and learning now has gained momentum and will firmly establish itself in the education process. Even now in order to motivate students and enhance the quality of teaching new interactive forms of content delivery are being developed; new assessment methods using multimedia technologies and various forms of getting feedback, such as proctoring technologies, are being tested. For the short time purposes it is possible to use the distance delivery of content and to postpone practice and laboratory work until the quarantine is over. However, a longer period of

quarantine will call for developing multimedia technologies for acquiring certain practical skills and will expand the share of student independent work. The country's HEIs are joining their efforts in order to disseminate information and open online courses for students and teachers on online teaching and learning. The state HEIs get financial support from the Government for teachers' salaries and maintenance allowance for students. For private HEIs financial stability will present a major challenge in case the pandemic lasts longer than three to six months (during graduation and admission periods).

3. In your opinion, what Impact has the COVID-19 Crisis caused to internationalization of higher education quality assurance?

The pandemic is having a strong impact on education internationalization. It is highly likely that this year will see a critically low admission of foreign students in Russian HEIs and there will be fewer outgoing Russian students. This is connected with travelling restrictions, issuing and extending visas and other problems beyond control of HEIs. Even those students who are currently studying in Russia can postpone their education or even give it up. This is a big challenge for mobility programmes, for the cooperation of teachers, implementing joint projects, exchange visits and conferences. Online communication cannot fully replace face to face interaction. If the pandemic stays for a long time various forms of distance international cooperation are bound to develop: open online courses, online platforms for communication of students and teachers, information resources, social networks, etc. In order to ensure the quality of educational content at the international level we need even tighter cooperation (bilateral and networking) between accreditation agencies. The main issue here is trust to HEIs and organizations developing online courses and trust in the work of accreditation agencies that ensure their quality.

4. During the COVID-19 Crisis, what do you think APQN should do to realize its goal of "Dissolving Boundaries for a Quality Region" and "to be committed to the quality of higher education and is supportive of both internal and external quality assurance in the AQR"?

In the conditions of student and teacher self-isolation, isolation of whole counties APQN can become an information resource for dissemination of best practices on choosing online technologies of teaching, assessing and recommending open online courses, methods of evaluating online study programmes. We need a flexible and highly technological internet platform for crowdsourcing. We can also set up a social network for APQN members on the example of ENQA <https://twitter.com/ENQAtwt/status/1243124403455623170>

We might also find useful organizing some webinars for informing APQN members on the situation in different countries, for example <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jldaWYcOYt8&feature=youtu.be> and online conferences, for example, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ivDPjEt-LA&feature=youtu.be>

Jagannath Patil & Syun Tutilya

Interview on in Quality of Higher Education with APQN Board Directors during the COVID-19 Crisis			
Your Name	Dr. Jagannath Patil Prof. Syun Tutilya	Your organization	NIAD QE
APQN Position	APQN Board Director APQN Project Leader	Country	Japan
<p><u>1. As an external QAAs (QAA) during the COVID-19 Crisis, what role do you think your QAAs plays in ensuring the internal quality of higher education institutions (HEIs)?</u></p> <p>We believe the online teaching and learning will in principle enhance students' opportunities for learning and empower teachers to teach in a wider variety of methods and that academic corruption would not be logically associated with the expansion of online methods.</p> <p>In the short term, quality assurance procedure will have to endorse the quality of the learning outcomes expected from the students' experiences in the COCOVID-19 circumstances as equivalent with or superior to those in the past times. In the long term, those ad hoc measures to cope with the sudden emergence of the situation will have be revaluated and incorporated in external QAA's standards and review procedures.</p> <p>We have worked with HEIs in rescheduling the deadlines for the self-study submission and other components of the review procedure.</p>			
<p><u>2. During the COVID-19 Crisis, the HEIs around the world have begun online teaching. How do you think the internal quality of the HEIs should be guaranteed?</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Currently variety of digital platforms are available for interactive delivery of online learning . Many are free and open-source but customized tools are also used by universities with help if ICT companies and departments 2. Curriculum or grading practices may not need big changes except for some adaptations needed to match mode of delivery 3. In long run increased use of online learning may be cost effective for both learners and institutions . So initial investments would be worth future benefits. Off course if government can fund or subsidize for cheaper connectivity, it would boost the process. 4. HEIs would already have some capacity of online teaching methods. Further training of staff /faculty by professionals would be needed. HEIs would need to setup pedagogy and technology innovation units , if they don't have it already. 5. ICT enabled tools would strengthen academic and student support services by increasing efficiency and transparency . 			

3. In your opinion, what Impact has the COVID-19 Crisis caused to internationalization of higher education quality assurance?

1. So far international human movement has been greatly suppressed, which has made it extremely difficult to do the same things as we did normally in the domain of quality assurance as well as in the domain of international education per se.

2. The COVID-19 pandemic apparently has discouraged the free movement of students and teachers across national and regional borders, thereby possibly decreasing the degree of human interactions. That might be a case of erosion, but at the same time, people have been made so aware of the future of digital communication over the Internet that we may be able to envision a more diversified set of ways of educational interaction across borders.

3. Online learning is an added part of the whole spectrum of ways of learning, so logically it will strengthen the architecture of international education practices.

4. Quality assurance of domestic higher education has been inspired to incorporate the digital and online practices of reviewing, site-visiting and conferencing. The international quality

4. During the COVID-19 Crisis, what do you think APQN should do to realize its goal of “Dissolving Boundaries for a Quality Region” and “to be committed to the quality of higher education and is supportive of both internal and external quality assurance in the AQR”?

1. As network of QA bodies , APQN can collect and promote good practices of response of QA bodies during covi-19 crisis

2. Conduct capacity building webinars on alternate digital tools of QA

3. Similar activities can be done for institutional members focused on internal QA.

I-Jung Grace Lu

Interview on in Quality of Higher Education with APQN Board Directors during the COVID-19 Crisis			
Your Name	I-Jung Grace Lu	Your organization	Higher Education Evaluation Accreditation Council of Taiwan
APQN Position	Board Director	Country	Taiwan/Chinese Taipei
<p><u>1. As an external QAAs (QAA) during the COVID-19 Crisis, what role do you think your QAAs plays in ensuring the internal quality of higher education institutions (HEIs)?</u></p> <p>As an external QA agency, we work closely with the HEIs on supporting the teaching them during the outbreak of COVID-19, both online and face-to-face. Due to the lesser impact we have here in Taiwan during the pandemic, most of our schedules for reviews and onsite visits of all types of accreditation remain mostly the same. However, throughout the process, HEEACT formed an emergency group in responding to the outbreak and supervised the operation of HEEACT in advance of the potential outbreak, in order to make sure that the operation of the QA process remains with high quality. HEEACT also announced official guidelines on the actions the HEIs, staff, reviewers, and all stakeholders should take in response to the pandemic. For example, we announced that all reviewers and staff shall fill in the weekly survey on health condition and traveling history of the past week so that HEEACT can track these reviewers and staff if needed to prevent total lockdown and also to protect the HEIs and the entire operation process of the QA system.</p> <p>In terms of the accreditation process, to state most of the operation remains the same, and most universities remain using face-to-face courses as the main way of teaching. However, we still increase the usage of online conference meetings through Zoom and Webex in terms of having discussions with the universities and the reviewers to reduce the risk of traveling. Presentations of the accreditation processes and guidelines of different QA projects are also well prepared and are ready to be shared with the HEIs and reviewers, even the public through the internet. As for online courses, since the current teaching among most of the universities remains almost the same as the teaching before the outbreak, most of the lessons remain face-to-face. However, during the review process, the reviewers are encouraged to ask about how the HEIs use their online system and also to examine the students' feedback system. HEEACT believes that it is crucial to have a strong feedback system to monitor the learning of the students.</p> <p>HEEACT believes that QA shall still remain a priority for HEIs in all circumstances.</p>			

However, it is also important to note that there may be various levels of difficulties in remaining such quality of education according to the time period and level of crisis we faced. Of course the longer the time of the crisis remains, the higher possibility that the quality will be impacted. Unfortunately, to the current state, we do not have experience in responding to such a crisis yet. Thus, future research should be conducted in order to understand the challenges and issues the HEIs and QA agencies may face and also develop relevant guidelines, methods, and support for the HEIs.

2. During the COVID-19 Crisis, the HEIs around the world have begun online teaching. How do you think the internal quality of the HEIs should be guaranteed?

The online course has long existed and has become more and more popular since MOOCs have become popular around the world after the 2000s. Famous MOOCs websites such as Coursera, Udemy, etc., have long existed. Many HEIs around the world have been using such a system in providing online courses and certificates for many years, including universities with a high reputation such as Cambridge and Harvard. Various types of media are used, including video, audio, interactive media, and texts, within the MOOCs platforms. Moreover, to date, the HEIs around the world are making most of the course information through electronic files in order to reduce paperwork. Most of the traditional assessment systems based on paper have also been gradually replaced by a more modern system based on an online system. The HEIs in Taiwan also follows this pattern of using fewer paper documents and material in their courses, and that all courses are encouraged to create a MOOC platform. Thus, when it comes to organizing and distributing the information through an online system, most of the HEIs should be ready.

However, the only concern about online teaching is the interaction between the lecturers and their students. How to engage students in their lessons become one of the most critical lessons for all educators to learn. To state, there is still no precise training for these HEI educators in developing skills in engaging students in their courses. However, I believe that in the future, training and capacity building sessions shall be given to these educators on how to engage students during online learning. HEEACT also sees this as an important topic for our next research project, which hopes to develop an evaluation system for online courses and also to provide relevant training for the HEIs in relation to quality assure their online courses.

3. In your opinion, what Impact has the COVID-19 Crisis caused to internationalization of higher education quality assurance?

The COVID-19 indeed greatly impacted the internationalization of higher education QA. Several important QA agencies' conferences and networking events have been canceled or postponed due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus. Several international events of HEEACT has also been postponed.

However, it is also encouraging to see how QA networks and organizations, such as

APQN and INQAAHE, have been taking actions in understanding the current situation of all QA agencies around the world, examine the impact the COVID-19 has caused to the QA agencies and the HEIs, and most importantly, evaluate how to provide further support to these nations even if all transportations are shut down and many cities are shut down. Also, thanks to technology, international interactions, and cooperation between QA agencies around the world still carry on. For example, HEEACT kept in touch with several QA agencies and invite them to participate in future academic events.

The COVID-19 may reshape how we view international education and how closely it is linked to technology and the online system. It also let us rethink the importance of online support and the assessment of online courses. It is not hard to foresee that better QA models and mechanisms developed for the online courses and micro-credential after the COVID-19 pandemic passes. The external QA agencies need to develop online materials and resources for the HEIs to support their QA mechanisms. Besides, the external QA agencies need to develop online materials and resources to support the faculty, students, and stakeholders, and also develop guidelines to support the HEIs in their transition to online learning. As for suggestions for QA agencies and networks, a conference focusing on the application of educational technology and the QA model for online education should be held.

4. During the COVID-19 Crisis, what do you think APQN should do to realize its goal of “Dissolving Boundaries for a Quality Region” and “to be committed to the quality of higher education and is supportive of both internal and external quality assurance in the AQR”?

APQN could form an online support network for all QA agencies in sharing their challenges and experiences with each other. Research on the COVID-19 Impact on HEIs and QA systems shall also be conducted in order to be an important foundation for future action for supporting the QA agencies. Reduction of fees in consultation or even free consultation through the online platform could also be provided to support the QA agencies who are members of APQN. Even some of the financial support shall be provided to the QA agencies if they are really greatly impacted by the pandemic, such as the reduction of membership fees. The relevant guideline shall also be provided in order to guide them through the time of crisis in supporting their HEIs.

Farida Nurmanbetova

Interview on in Quality of Higher Education with APQN Board Directors during the COVID-19 Crisis			
Your Name	Farida Nurmanbetova	Your organization	Eurasian Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Health Care (ECAQA)
APQN Position	Board Director (Elected)	Country	Kazakhstan
<p><u>1. As an external QAAs (QAA) during the COVID-19 Crisis, what role do you think your QAAs plays in ensuring the internal quality of higher education institutions (HEIs)?</u></p> <p>Currently the higher education institutions (HEIs) are facing unprecedented challenges as a result of the coronavirus outbreak globally. I think that the QAAs should cooperate with HEIs in order to identify and address current needs and analyze the COVID-19 impact.</p> <p>In accordance with the introduction of the national lock-down due to COVID-19 the Kazakhstan HEIS have moved from traditional education to distance learning since March 16, 2020.</p> <p>Given that the HEIs switched the scheduled courses to online, “Guidelines on the organization of the educational process in higher education institutions to prevent the spread of coronavirus during a pandemic” have been approved by Order#123, April 1, 2020 of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan.</p> <p>Due to the Governmental Regulations the HEIs are following proposed plan that includes implementation the crisis management strategies and plans to deal with the spread of the coronavirus as well as launching a webinar series designed to enable university faculty and administrators alike to share best practices in distance learning. In view of special circumstances we are currently working to find ways to participate in the aforementioned plan.</p> <p>We are planning to propose a guide on implementation of the ECAQA Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Distance Learning and Academic Integrity, the Guidelines for Monitoring of Implementation Distance Learning.</p>			
<p><u>2. During the COVID-19 Crisis, the HEIs around the world have begun online teaching. How do you think the internal quality of the HEIs should be guaranteed?</u></p> <p>Following interactive delivery of online teaching and learning methods are used by Kazakhstan HEIs: Lectures and seminars conducted online using MS Teams, Meet by Google Hangouts, Zoom and other services, and student assignments on the Canvas, Moodle, Univer and Platonus platforms.</p> <p>Distance teaching is following the same curriculum and grading practices. The final</p>			

examination methods are still under consideration.

Financial decisions should be made by the HEIs Administration in accordance with local governmental regulations..

The internal quality assurance mechanisms in distance learning at the HEIs should meet the same requirements of traditional education as well as some additional requirements to ensure the faculty training, course instruction and links to clear descriptions of the technical support offered and how to obtain it.

The distance teaching training of faculty and staff should reflect appropriate methods of delivered distance learning.

HEIs should introduce methods of ensuring that tutors trained and skilled to deliver support to students effectively.

HEIs should provide academic support services and resources that can help student succeed in the online course.

HEIs could also consider setting up at 24-hour helpline for students in order to give them adequate advice and reassurance during this difficult time.

3. In your opinion, what Impact has the COVID-19 Crisis caused to internationalization of higher education quality assurance?

In future years to come certain courses could be set up as complete distance learning courses, while others will inevitably remain as before due to course nature. Currently there is not enough information to predict future trends in internationalization as the outbreak is still in progress and it is not known when it will be resolved. The effect of COVID 19 outbreak could be fully assessed once the outbreak is over and education processes normalize.

4. During the COVID-19 Crisis, what do you think APQN should do to realize its goal of “Dissolving Boundaries for a Quality Region” and “to be committed to the quality of higher education and is supportive of both internal and external quality assurance in the AQR”?

I would suggest considering the development of manuals for course conversion from traditional to distance learning, including assessments and teaching methods, and programme evaluation. It would be helpful for HEIs for revision of organizational transformation and improve strategies related to distance learning.

It could also beneficial to establish contact with HEIs in order to identify their current challenges and involve APQN in their solutions, where possible.

Deepthi Bandara

Interview on in Quality of Higher Education with APQN Board Directors during the COVID-19 Crisis			
Your Name	Deepthi Bandara	Your organization	University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
APQN Position	Board Director	Country	Sri Lanka
<p><u>1. As an external QAAs (QAA) during the COVID-19 Crisis, what role do you think your QAAs plays in ensuring the internal quality of higher education institutions (HEIs)?</u></p> <p>The Quality Assurance Council (QAC) of the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka is the QA Agency for all 15 State Universities of Sri Lanka. In the last 6 weeks since the first COVID patient was found in Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka has been in a lockdown situation. For most districts of the country there was a total curfew which prohibits anyone from leaving their houses. The QAC is located in Colombo, the capital city of Sri Lanka which has been under curfew continuously due to the high number of COVID patients found in the district. Hence QAC I presume does not have any employees presence physically in the premises thus preventing its director taking action regarding any academic or QA related matters unfortunately. If the current crisis is short term, QAC I am sure will spring back to action and take up its role in approving curricula, grading, award of credits etc. which have to be formally approved by the QA when a new program is launched in a State University. The QAC has been unable to provide QA support during this period. Fortunately it completed all scheduled site visits - for program and Institutional reviews just before lock down.</p>			
<p><u>2. During the COVID-19 Crisis, the HEIs around the world have begun online teaching. How do you think the internal quality of the HEIs should be guaranteed?</u></p> <p>First of all, the HEI must make sure it has the infrastructure in place to conduct online teaching/learning. If available it needs to figure out how many teachers are conducting online activities at present and how successful they are. This group needs to be given support to continue. For those who are lagging in online teaching activities, much support should be given in training them as quickly as possible - by hands on training opportunities. HEI has to ensure all teachers are able to go online at a certain time. It also has to make sure that students can access online activity. In Sri lance, connectivity in some districts is not at an optimum - hence it could be disadvantageous for such students. Some measure has to be taken for all students to be involved and engaged in online activities. It is necessary that HEIs communicate with connectivity vendors in procuring</p>			

connection at subsidized rates for the students and staff.

Periodic surveys would have to be conducted by the HEI to make sure that students are learning and whether the level of learning is satisfactory.

Apart from the teachers and students, immediate training should be done for the administrative staff to go online as much of these activities are halted at preset slowing down administrative procedures significantly.

3. In your opinion, what Impact has the COVID-19 Crisis caused to internationalization of higher education quality assurance?

The COVID 19 crisis in my opinion has crippled the prospective overseas educational journey for many students and even staff who would have spent their sabbatical leave in research or teaching in another university overseas.

The insecurity that prevails when one falls sick overseas is overwhelming at present times. The number of instances when Sri Lankan students pleaded for them to return to the country was very significant. Parents would think twice in sending their children overseas for education for a while - at least till some kind of normalcy returns in the world. Thus, I feel that this is an area which will suffer significantly.

While many would resort to online teaching which would be an inevitable alternative to survive, whether it could totally replace in-person teaching/learning would be a question to be answered. In my opinion a 100% replacement is not possible however much online teaching/learning is achieved. The "human touch" is one which cannot go online unfortunately, and it is such a valuable component of teaching/learning for anyone.

A few innovative international quality assurance practices would have to be worked out to ensure the quality of higher education in the future - this might be an area the APQN Board can work on collectively.

4. During the COVID-19 Crisis, what do you think APQN should do to realize its goal of "Dissolving Boundaries for a Quality Region" and "to be committed to the quality of higher education and is supportive of both internal and external quality assurance in the AQR"?

APQN can draw up key quality parameters (may be 10) that would be valid for all in the Asia Pacific region.

For each parameter draw up the states it can be in when ensuring quality.

e.g. Connectivity to go online - a. very good, b. good c. satisfactory d. poor.

Work out what should be done to bring the HEI to the acceptable quality standard.

Some communication would be necessary with the HEI concerned.

Provide advice of possible options to realize the identified quality standard.

Assist in providing the possible option - advice, financing, making connection with the right parties

Monitor progress and troubleshoot

Once quality standard is reached - certify