

POLICY AND PRACTICE: QPCD APPROACHES IN NATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS

This chapter considers aspects of QA systems that have been adopted by selected countries around the world. In line with the purposes of this research, the intention is to sketch the overall QA configuration in each case, while highlighting those elements of the approach, which are relevant to objectives and functions of quality promotion, capacity development and/or quality enhancement. A distinction is drawn between the last two terms, where quality enhancement is taken to mean change for improvement against some baseline of quality, or QA capacity, that already exists; while capacity development is taken to mean development of capacity to deliver and manage, quality in higher education, where existing capacity is inadequate or untapped.

The chapter begins with overviews of selected national QA systems, and very briefly considers the relevance of international and regional QA networks. As the research did not locate an evaluative literature of national QA systems, it relied heavily on agency websites and documents and/or information compiled by sources sometimes closely associated with agency efforts. It must be noted that there is limited systematic research into the quality impact of national agencies on national higher education systems, given the relatively recent growth of quality assurance in higher education. Accordingly, the overviews and interpretations are presented in a provisional way. The national systems were selected so as to provide a mix of developed and developing country approaches, a mix of experiences, and a mix of cases that are relatively more or less familiar to South African higher education. The chapter seeks to map such common elements as may exist in the QP, CD/QE approaches it has examined, and ends by considering the relevance of these findings for the HEQC's own QPCD framework.

3.1 National Quality Assurance Systems and QP, CD and QE approaches

3.1.1 Australia

In Australia, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) promotes, audits, and reports on QA in Australian higher education. AUQA was formally established by Australia's Ministerial Council on Education, Training and Youth Affairs in March 2000, and receives core funding from the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments whose ministers for higher education are members of that Council. Nonetheless, AUQA seeks to maintain strict independence from government and from higher education institutions.

AUQA divides its responsibilities into two areas:⁷² quality audit and quality enhancement, which appear to break down broadly into activities for accountability and developmental purposes.

Quality audits are conducted on a five-yearly cycle in two categories. First, audits are conducted of self-accrediting Australian higher education institutions, and aim to focus on the extent to which institutions are achieving their missions, the adequacy of their QA arrangements, and their success in achieving standards deemed appropriate to Australian higher education. Second, audits are conducted of State and Territory Government higher education accreditation authorities, and aim to focus on recognition and accreditation processes, and the consistency of an authority's judgements with those made in other states and territories. Audits constitute a self-evaluation and site visit, and are conducted in line with an AUQA manual of audit policies and procedures, drawing on an AUQA-trained pool of auditors. Audit reports are public and AUQA references audit findings to comment on the relative standards and international standing of the Australian higher education system and its QA processes. As such, although audit is focused on accountability, in-built feedback processes are intended to support quality promotion and quality enhancement also, at both system and institutional levels.

AUQA's quality enhancement activities seem primarily to support research and reflection into QA and quality enhancement, and dissemination of good practices. They include:

- Australian Universities Quality Forum: an annual forum to discuss and advance QA and quality enhancement, and to share good practices. Papers presented are the result of research and experience of academics and QA practitioners, and are published by AUQA.
- AUQA good practice database: an Internet resource of good practices identified in audit and judged to be transferable throughout the sector. The database includes a relatively wide range of topics (e.g. curriculum, internationalisation, support services).
- AUQA workshops, seminars and occasional publications on selected topics and themes.
- AUQA Web site: provides access to the good practice database, occasional publications and other quality-related resources and links.

The Australian QA model appears to represent a 'light touch' approach that has worked well in context. The 'light touch' is perhaps principally associated with the audit model. Yet the

⁷² See <http://www.auqa.edu.org>

quality enhancement aspects of the model also seem to have been strategically selected, and moreover to presuppose an existing capacity for quality and QA. Such an approach appears to have been shaped by earlier experiences which served to promote quality in Australian higher education, to support quality enhancement at institutional level and to create opportunity for institutional self-reflection about quality and QA. AUQA is the successor to a sub-committee of the former Higher Education Council, which administered the application of Australia's quality policy in the early 1990s. This Committee conducted voluntary annual reviews of selected QA processes and outcomes in Australian universities between 1993 and 1995, and had some reported success in facilitating improvements in teaching quality. Ultimately, the Council and its subcommittee were disbanded when the Australian government decided to mainstream quality as part of its more general accountability mechanisms (qualitative performance indicators), without reference to sector experts. The subsequent formation of AUQA, a streamlined variant of the earlier model, may have been linked primarily to the need to assure 'customers' of the quality of Australian higher education in a global marketplace in which competing higher education systems all have highly visible QA mechanisms. Accordingly, AUQA has apparently shifted focus to external quality and QA systems validation from a 'whole institutional' perspective. Interestingly, AUQA continues to showcase examples of good practice, although a similar emphasis by the Committee had led to concerns that diversity would suffer as all institutions sought to emulate those at the top of league tables in the Committee's annual reports.⁷³

In sum, the Australian QA model appears to conceive quality promotion at least in part from a 'market' perspective (i.e. advocating quality for external purposes). The model also appears to assume sufficient internal resources in Australian higher education to sustain quality enhancement on a continuous basis, and to generate best practice.

3.1.2 Colombia⁷⁴

The QA system in Colombia includes a range of governmental structures and mechanisms for approving new public higher education institutions, for licensing new private providers, for registering new academic programmes, and for supervising the functioning of higher education institutions and academic programmes (ensuring compliance with minimum standards, and guarantees of high quality).

73 Vidovich, L, Fourie, M, Van der Westhuizen, L, Alt, H and Holtzhausen, S (2000). 'Quality Teaching and Learning in Australian and South African Universities: Comparing Policies and Practices'. *Compare: a Journal of Comparative Education*, Vol 30, No 2: 193-209: 193, 196-197.

74 Revelo, JR and Hernández, CA (2003). *The National Accreditation System in Colombia: Experiences from the National Council of Accreditation*. Paris, International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO).

'Law 30-1992' which reformed Colombia's higher education system, established a national system of accreditation as a strategy to promote and recognise quality, and as a tool to augment transparency and to inform more knowledgeable choices by consumers as to professional education on offer. A National Council of Accreditation (CNA) functions under the National Council of Higher Education, which is the main body for policy advice and policy-making in Colombian higher education. CNA performs two QA functions. First, it reports on the evaluation of 'previous accreditation' of specified academic programmes (programmes of wide social impact, such as teacher training, engineering and health programmes); this is known as the 'verification of minimum quality standards'. Second, it reports on the accreditation of undergraduate programmes and higher education institutions.

The second function is constituted under the 'Accreditation of Excellence' process, which is voluntary and temporary (i.e. accreditation is granted for a specified period ranging from three to ten years). The process seems similar to that used in other countries, being based on self- and external peer evaluations made with reference to (66) pre-designed quality characteristics as optima towards which programmes/institutions should strive. The process is supported by CNA guidelines, handbooks and introductory training for peer evaluators. Accreditation of Excellence was intentionally created as a quality enhancement mechanism in autonomous institutions, to complement other elements of the Colombian QA system, which are concerned mainly with quality control. Specifically, Accreditation of Excellence is intended to provide motivation for institutions to engage in processes of continuous quality improvement.

The CNA believes that accreditation processes are making an ongoing contribution to the dissemination and institutional appropriation of a culture of evaluation, which enhances concerns with quality and management processes in general. Yet significant challenges remain. For example, there is a need to bring the Accreditation of Excellence process to scale. The Colombian institutional landscape is heterogeneous, and while some institutions have embarked on systematic self-evaluation, others are still grappling with the need to develop and test instruments for collecting information in the first place. It seems fair to conclude that, while Accreditation of Excellence has helped to promote quality, capacity for optimal participation in the programme has yet to be built presumably by institutions themselves, as the model itself incorporates minimal capacity development elements and takes quality enhancement as its departure point.

3.1.3 Finland⁷⁵

In the early 1990s, Finland embarked on various structural reforms in its higher education system, with due regard to economic realities, and with a view to encouraging specialisation in areas of strength, co-operation in appropriate fields, and pruning of redundancy. As part of higher education renewal, efforts have been made to promote and strengthen a culture of evaluation and to engender a focus on higher education development. Today all Finnish higher education institutions (universities and polytechnics) are obliged by law to evaluate themselves and to take part in external evaluations. Evaluations are conducted at institutional and programme level, and some pursue particular themes selected for investigation. Evaluation consists of self-evaluation, in which it is hoped students play an integral part, and a peer review in which international experts should be included; evaluation reports are public.

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) was set up in 1995 to support the long-term development of higher education – and quality in higher education – through evaluations. Its roles are intended to include:

- assisting higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education in matters relating to evaluation and QA;
- conducting evaluation of the accreditation and establishment of polytechnics;
- organising evaluations of the operations and policies of higher education institutions.
- initiating evaluations of higher education and promoting higher education development;
- engaging in international co-operation in evaluation;
- promoting research on evaluation of higher education;
- evaluating and accepting professional courses offered by higher education institutions, and keeping a registry of them;
- supporting higher education institutions while they design their own QA and evaluation systems (e.g. providing advisory and consultancy services in the implementation of evaluations, offering educational visits and training seminars on evaluation, maintaining a library and information service, providing financial aid for projects involving several institutions);
- developing evaluation methodology, and disseminating good practices to higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education;

75 See <http://www.kka.fi>; Ministry of Education, Finland (August 2003). Report on the Finnish Implementation of the Bologna Declaration and the Prague Communiqué; Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (2001). Action Plan for 2000-2003. Helsinki, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC).

- producing national data enabling international comparison of higher education institutions for policy makers, students, trade and industry; and
- ascertaining legal protection for students through accreditation as regards lifelong learning, network teaching between institutions, and international student exchange in particular.

The FINHEEC model appears to be a strongly developmental one, focusing on the promotion of a culture of evaluation, and seeking to support this with programmatic elements of advocacy (research, dissemination, networking), as well as capacity development (evaluation design, general training, advice on implementing evaluations).

3.1.4 India⁷⁶

Forms of quality assurance and control have been present in Indian higher education for 150 years, most of them part of the British colonial legacy (e.g. regulations on minimum standards, inspections and audits by state governments, performance appraisal of universities by the University Grants Commission [UGC], reviews by funding agencies, and certification of professional programmes by professional bodies).

The UGC is responsible for developing quality control mechanisms for Indian higher education (e.g. eligibility criteria for establishment of institutions, minimum standards of instruction, eligibility tests for university lecturers). In addition to mandatory mechanisms, the UGC has initiated schemes with the goal of enriching education quality. These include, for example: inter-university and national centres to improve the quality of teaching and learning and research, and to provide information resources and facilities; curriculum development centres; and subject specialist panels.

In 1994, a new external element was added to this system when the UGC established a National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) as an autonomous institution. Its primary agenda is intended to be one of promoting quality and leading higher education institutions to maximise their potential for quality education (i.e. to assure higher standards, rather than to ensure minimum standards). The NAAC is an attempt to respond to India's need for quality development and enhancement at the national level, in the context of a huge, complex and diverse higher education system⁷⁷ and of imperatives to improve access

76 Stella, A (2002). *External Quality Assurance in Indian Higher Education: Case Study of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council*. Paris, International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO); National Assessment and Accreditation Council (2004). *A Profile*. Bangalore, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC); <http://www.naac-india.com>

77 E.g. universities can be 'unitary' or 'affiliating' with numerous affiliated colleges.

to higher education institutions of comparable quality. Specifically, NAAC's vision is ultimately to make quality the defining element of higher education in India through a combination of self- and external quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance initiatives. Its key tasks are:

- to arrange for mainly voluntary periodic assessment and accreditation of institutions of higher education or units thereof, or specific academic programmes or projects;
- to stimulate the academic environment for promotion of quality of teaching and learning and research in higher education institutions;
- to encourage self-evaluation, accountability, autonomy and innovations in higher education.
- to undertake quality-related research studies, consultancy and training programmes; and
- to collaborate with other stakeholders of higher education for quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance.

NAAC aims to achieve assessment processes that are ameliorative and enabling, rather than punitive or judgemental. Given the needs of the system, however, some inevitable tensions between development and accountability are present; thus, although assessment and accreditation are voluntary, the UGC has now made NAAC accreditation mandatory for development grants. Assessment is conducted at institutional and departmental levels, using NAAC manuals and seven (weighted) assessment criteria, and following the three-stage process of self-study report, on-site visit by a peer assessment panel, and final accreditation decision by the Executive Council of NAAC. Reports are published for individual institutions and also serve to generate a 'state-wise analysis'.

Given that assessment and accreditation are new processes for higher education in India, NAAC has had to identify and apply a range of promotional strategies. Various processes have sought to involve stakeholders in evolving norms, criteria, methods and instruments; awareness programmes have aimed to familiarise academics and administrators with key concepts; debates and workshops have highlighted critical issues; training for assessment panellists has been conducted; UGC support has been sought to meet some of the financial implications of accreditation for institutions; and NAAC has set about forging partnerships with state governments, relationships with other QA role players, and international linkages.

In NAAC's view, its first few years of operation yielded some positive gains. Institutions appear more aware of their responsibilities in respect of quality; a culture of increased participation and accountability is beginning to emerge at institutional level; and some healthy practices are being institutionalised (e.g. student feedback, performance appraisal,

involvement of employers, students and parents in quality improvement efforts). However, NAAC has also acknowledged a need to improve on aspects of its own processes and outcomes. This has meant attempting to consolidate effort in recent years in particular areas:

- developing procedures, guidelines and mechanisms for accredited institutions, or those institutions who are obliged to act on assessment outcomes. As one example, a methodology for re-accreditation has been finalised incorporating post-accreditation reviews, feedback from the accredited institutions and the outcome of national consultations. As a second example, NAAC promotes and has established guidelines for the establishment of Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQACs) in accredited institutions, to develop 'conscious, consistent and catalytic improvement in the performance of institutions'.⁷⁸ The IQAC is envisaged as incorporating academic, management and administrative membership and as serving to promote quality at institutional level, by developing quality benchmarks and parameters for the institution, and preparing an annual self-review report. NAAC has recently (April 2005) proposed the establishment of State-Level Quality Assurance Cells as a means to facilitate and co-ordinate awareness programmes and liaison with the Departments of higher education in each state, and to take up post-accreditation quality sustenance measures.
- strengthening efforts to professionalize and expand the pool of peer assessors;
- improving the dissemination of information to stakeholders and involving stakeholders in quality promotion. One area of focus has been the development of action plans for quality evaluation and upgrading, with a view to identifying appropriate incentives for accreditation; these have been approved by the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Another focus has been the development of a model student charter, to highlight students' roles and responsibilities in defining and demanding quality in higher education.
- strengthening the NAAC's advisory role by analysing accreditation reports to support policy initiatives at state and system levels (e.g. evolution of a national qualifications framework); and
- initiating collaborations with other national professional bodies for accreditation of specialised subjects.
- Strengthening dialogue with QA agencies of other countries, and participating in QA initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region.

78 NAAC 2004: 18; National Assessment and Accreditation Council (January 2005). Revised Guidelines for the Creation of the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) in Accredited Institutions: A Post-Accreditation Quality Sustenance Activity. Bangalore, National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC).

- Strengthening research on quality assessment.

The Indian QA model is an interesting one for several reasons. First, it is an attempt to combine older (quality control and thus a strong compliance culture) and newer (quality promotion/enhancement and capacity development) QA elements in a complex higher education system with substantial transformation imperatives and associated challenges in terms of gaining buy-in and eliciting response. Second, it has applied a range of quality promotion strategies, underpinning these with articulated development goals. Third, the NAAC in particular appears to apprehend an elaborated approach that will ultimately address not only quality enhancement at institutional and sub-institutional levels, but also the development of stakeholder capacity to engage issues of quality, and system capacity to develop policy that facilitates the achievement of quality.

3.1.5 Philippines⁷⁹

Higher education in the Philippines is diversified and pluralistic, reflecting a colonial history in which higher education structures were established consecutively under Spanish, American and Filipino rule. Today, the system comprises Catholic private institutions, private and non-sectarian establishments of Protestant affiliation, and public institutions (accounting for only 25% of total enrolment). The national QA system in the Philippines comprises three principal mechanisms: minimum quality standards stipulated and verified by a national buffer body; the regulation of professional competences of higher education graduates by a designated board; and voluntary, non-governmental accreditation processes.

The accreditation movement began in the Philippines in the early 1950s through the initiative of a group of private-sector educators who believed that a system of standards, monitoring and voluntary self-assessment would be critical for quality enhancement. Between 1957 and 1971, three voluntary private-sector accrediting bodies were formed, and a public-sector body followed in 1989. Each body opted to focus on programme accreditation using its own accrediting instruments and standards, while a federated body was created in 1976 in an attempt to co-ordinate these.

The Higher Education Act of 1994 established a Commission on Higher Education (CHED), as a buffer body with mixed regulatory and developmental powers in the state supervision of higher education. These include such QA roles as setting minimum

⁷⁹ Arcelo, AA (2003). In Pursuit of Continuing Quality in Higher Education Through Accreditation: the Philippine Experience. Paris, International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO).

standards for programmes and institutions; monitoring and evaluating the performance of programmes and institutions for appropriate incentives or sanctions; and identifying, supporting and developing potential centres of excellence in programme areas needed for the development of world-class scholarship. The CHED's policy has been to encourage the continued use of voluntary non-governmental accreditation systems in aid of the exercise of its regulatory functions. It has authorised the federated accreditation body to certify quality of education offered in accredited programmes and institutions. Thus non-government accreditation as practised in the Philippines essentially covers higher education institutions that have already complied with minimum standards set by government. Accreditation is intended to be a voluntary developmental (continuous self-improvement) mechanism, which assures the public of institutions' compliance with and beyond minimum standards.

In the Philippines, non-government accreditation processes have from the start sought to constitute a quality promotion strategy within the academy and at programme level and have, in some cases, included public information campaigns as well. Moreover, government has chosen to utilise the voluntary accreditation system as a mechanism for deregulation, creating a framework of four institutional accreditation levels that entail benefits in terms of administrative autonomy and access to incentive funds. These levels can be characterised as applicant status, accredited status, reaccredited status, and self-accrediting status,⁸⁰ and status is ultimately granted by the CHED: the higher the level of status achieved, the greater the measure of autonomy granted. The capacity of institutions to participate in voluntary accreditation processes and to improve their institutional accreditation status is supported by some forms of grant assistance for accreditation, including government grants channelled to accrediting agencies and an Institutional Development Assistance Programme.

Ultimately, the impact of accreditation processes in the Philippines appears to have been limited. Although by 2003, programme and institutional accreditation applications had in practice accelerated, most higher education programmes in the Philippines had yet to be accredited, and additional pressure was being brought to bear by the phenomenon of globalisation, requiring world-class standards in higher education. Accordingly, the ISO certification system has been identified as a basis for benchmarking higher education, in a joint effort with the national system of accreditation. ISO was first adopted in an academic programme of maritime education, and subsequently other programmes (e.g. in nursing

80 By 2003, no institution had acquired this fourth level of status. However, in 2001 the CHED opted to rationalise its supervision function, granting full autonomy status to 30 private providers and deregulated status to another 22 (effective for five years).

and computer education) have been ISO-certified. All of this leads to the conclusion that revitalised strategies of quality promotion and quality enhancement are being – and need to be – sought.

3.1.6 United Kingdom (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales)⁸¹

In the countries of the UK, various QA processes were initiated by higher education funding councils⁸² in the early 1990s. The Academic quality audit from 1991 to 2002 set out to establish the extent to which higher education institutions had effective overall procedures for the management of standards and quality in place. In addition, teaching quality assessments were conducted between 1993 and 2002, with some variation in the ways in which judgements were made and reported. Teaching quality review focused on core aspects of provision or at subject level, and was apparently successful in ensuring higher standards and improved QM practices, establishing a rich evidence base, and promoting quality to higher education management, academic staff and students. The process was however onerous, and seemed to entail the risk of an emergent compliance culture. Ultimately, a more integrated and lighter-touch approach was sought.

In 1997, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was established as an independent body funded by subscriptions from higher education institutions, and through contracts with the main UK higher education funding bodies. Today, the QAA is charged with safeguarding the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications, and for encouraging continuous improvement in the management of quality in higher education.

In England, the QAA reviews standards and quality through a peer review process of institutional audits (including collaborative provision audits) and academic subject reviews (including foundation degree reviews), and has also initiated a major review of healthcare programmes funded by the National Health Service (2003-06). The audit and review process proceeds on the basis of self-evaluation documents produced by institutions. Building capacity for audit and review purposes was the explicit intention of QAA developmental engagements with institutions in the period before audits began (2002-04).

81 See <http://www.qaa.ac.uk>; Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2003). A Brief Guide to Quality Assurance in UK Higher Education. Gloucester, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education; Council on Higher Education/Higher Education Quality Committee (September 2004). HEQC Seminar (Report): Improving Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in the United Kingdom and South Africa.

82 Higher Education Funding Council for England, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.

In Northern Ireland, institutions are reviewed using the audit method used in England. In Wales, a customised process of institutional review is followed.

In Scotland, an 'enhancement-led' institutional review (ELIR) process was consultatively developed and designed with a view to supporting continuous improvement of the effectiveness of the learning experience of students. The approach is distinctive within the UK because of its strongly collaborative nature, and its emphasis on the student experience of learning. The ELIR process attempts to integrate four elements. First, an annual discussion by QAA-Scotland with each institution considers how the outcomes of institutional subject reviews are contributing to enhanced QM and maintenance of standards. In addition, the four-year institutional review cycle should incorporate a 'reflective analysis' by each institution as a self-evaluation of its own management of quality enhancement; and this is coupled with a two-part review visit by the Scottish agency. Then, the agency provides annual feedback to the sector on the learning points from ELIR activity. In addition to this process, ELIR aims to integrate additional elements, namely, subject-level reviews operated internally by the institutions; improved forms of public information made available by institutions; the effective involvement of students in institutional QM, supported by a national development service; and a national programme of enhancement themes, aimed at developing and sharing good practice in teaching and learning.

QAA audit and review processes are supported by a range of instruments that include: an audit handbook and audit guide for student representatives, and an academic review handbook (England and Northern Ireland); an institutional review handbook (Wales); an ELIR handbook, operational manual, student guide and staff guide (Scotland); and procedures on representation for institutions whose QA procedures or academic standards have been judged inadequate. The QAA publishes and makes available on its Web site the findings of its various audits and reviews as part of the effort to promote quality to prospective students and their advisers, as well as graduate recruiters and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies. It has produced a series of working papers, describing features of good practice arising from institutional audits. In addition, the QAA has assisted in the development of clear and explicit higher education standards, for public information and as nationally agreed reference points for institutions, students, parents and employers. The components of this 'academic infrastructure' include a code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards, frameworks for higher education qualifications in the UK, detailed subject benchmark statements, and programme specifications. Finally, the QAA operates a range of liaison schemes and networks. The QAA provides a liaison officer to any institution wishing to have one, with a view to fostering mutual trust and improving two-way communication between agency and sector. A 'quality strategy network' serves as a knowledge exchange for institutional managers

responsible for QA strategy and planning. The QAA jointly sponsors roundtable discussions with other sectoral bodies as a forum on key issues in assuring and reporting on quality and standards in higher education.

The QAA approach (differentiated as it is at country level) appears successfully to mix elements of QA and quality promotion, through a multi-faceted approach that focuses in particular on freely available information, and the agency's continuous improvement of institutional QA systems in line with shared quality baselines or 'reference points' that facilitate both peer evaluation and stakeholder involvement. Quality enhancement aspects of the agency's work seem implicit throughout, given its continuous improvement objectives, while these aspects have acquired a particularly high profile through certain innovations in Scotland. Interestingly, while the QAA approach incorporates many opportunities for participation and reflection on practice, it does not appear to incorporate any strong element of intellectual enquiry into the theoretical and practical aspects of QA.

Other elements within UK higher education, complementary to the national QA system, have tried to consolidate a focus on quality enhancement, reflective practice and research in the areas of teaching and learning. Substantial dedicated funding has been variously sourced from the UK funding councils, universities, and grant and contract income, for initiatives, which have included:

- a requirement upon institutions by funding councils to produce a teaching and learning strategy;
- recognition of individual academic excellence via National Teaching Fellowships awards;
- the creation of a Learning and Teaching Support Network with 24 subject centres and a 'generic centre', to promote and share good practice in learning, teaching and assessment, through a mix of activities that include dissemination, engagement and brokerage of various partnerships and relationships;
- the establishment of an Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education as a membership body to encourage best practice in teaching and learning and to develop the professionalism of teaching in higher education (membership on the basis of experience, or through accredited institutional programmes for academic staff);
- the establishment of a Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning to stimulate development in learning and teaching, and to support take-up of good practices, supported by a National Coordination Team to provide educational development, management and dissemination support for individual projects and staff;
- recent initiative in England and Northern Ireland to establish Centres for Excellence in Teaching in Learning, with a visible presence at institutional level and direct

- engagement with student learning; and
- the establishment of a Higher Education Academy in 2004, joining up the Learning and Teaching Support Network, the Institute for Learning and Teaching In Higher Education and the National Coordination Team. The Academy aims to provide strategic advice and co-ordination for higher education, government, and funding bodies on policies and practices to enhance the student experience. It hopes also to support and advance curriculum and pedagogic development, and to enhance professional development and professional standing of all staff in UK higher education.

3.1.7 United States⁸³

In the US, governmental and non-governmental QA practices for higher education co-exist. There are federal regulations linked to institutional eligibility for federal programmes and financial aid; and state regulations linked to funding of public institutions, authorisation of institutions to operate or offer programmes, and professional registration of graduates. Alongside these governmental QA mechanisms, a tradition of non-governmental accreditation dates from the early years of the twentieth century. In terms of this tradition, accreditation is conceived as a collegial process of self-review and peer review for improvement of academic quality and public accountability of institutions and programmes. Accreditation processes are decentralised and at least 50 independent, non-governmental agencies carry out this role, some evaluating the quality of entire institutions (these tend to be regionally organised) and others evaluating quality in specific academic programmes. In essence, QA in the US is a 'triad' of complementary roles held by federal and state governments and accrediting agencies. The higher education sector professes a strong culture of internal review informed by academic perspectives, on the basis that US institutions know they will be scrutinised for their educational quality.

Accreditation in the US appears to have undergone a gradual elaboration of cross-cutting policy and procedures (e.g. periodic review as a mechanism for continuing accreditation; formalised procedures for gathering evidence; a methodology of detailed internal review preparatory to a site visit by an agency-appointed evaluation team; graduated agency actions for granting, conditioning or revoking accreditation; and so on). Co-ordination of accreditation activities remains voluntary, although co-ordination mechanisms are a feature: for example, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA, established

83 El-Khawas, E (2001). *Accreditation in the United States: Origins, Developments and Future Prospects*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO); <http://www.chea.org>

1996) is a private, non-profit organisation that co-ordinates accreditation activities and provides access to various kinds of accreditation information and resources. Yet notwithstanding a relatively long tradition of accreditation, procedural convergence and coordinating mechanisms, there has not been a movement in the US towards formulating explicit quality standards. Instead, according to a perspective from within the accreditation community, the respective merits of different focuses (e.g. on structures, processes and resources; on quantitative information; on student or institutional outcomes) are recognised, and the use of judgement in interpreting evidence remains central.

Accrediting agencies have been very instrumental in spurring academic change and improvement within institutions of higher learning. Their expectations for periodic review have spurred the development of strong internal systems of research and self-assessment. Their questioning of how new initiatives relate to an institution's overall mission has served a helpful role in shaping educationally useful innovation. The emphasis they place on developing good evidence has supported better decisions and better planning for new academic programmes. [...] Accrediting agencies have played a 'steering' role in ... helping higher education find methods that adapt to new demands without imposing restrictions or demands for immediate action. [They] have been deeply involved in sorting out a constructive response to most of the major changes faced by higher education in the past several decades, from developing ways in the 1960s to recognise prior learning, to addressing methods of on-line delivery of instruction at present [...] Agencies have helped the entire system of higher education deal with change constructively while also upholding needed dimensions of quality.⁸⁴

This description of the US QA model and its functioning suggests that a culture of continuous improvement, based in academic perspectives with a due sense of public accountability, has been successfully institutionalised in US higher education. Notwithstanding the absence of central quality monitoring, accrediting agencies appear under this view to have imposed long-term expectations on institutions to monitor, evaluate and report on their own operations and accomplishments, and thus to have contributed to the creation of a self-sustaining capacity for quality enhancement. While accreditation as a system of self-regulation in US higher education appears to have been adequately effective and reliable, various legislative proposals after 2000 have nevertheless favoured shifting more responsibility for academic quality to the federal level (e.g. giving great powers to Congress working with the federal Department of Education, in respect of

84 El-Khawas (2001: 120-1).

determining conditions for transfer of credit, or prescribing student learning outcomes).

3.1.8 International and Regional Models

The development of national QA capacities is supported by a range of international and regional networks. Some of the principal of these include:

- International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE);
- International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE);
- Asia and Pacific Quality Network (APQN);
- European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA);
- Nordic Quality Assurance Network in Higher Education; and
- Quality networking initiatives pursued by other regional associations, such as the Association of Arab Universities and the Association of African Universities.

Such networks aim to add a complementary dimension to the quality promotion, quality enhancement and/or capacity development objectives of national QA systems, typically through a focus on the following activities –

- dissemination of information, experience, good practice and new developments; Discussion of QA issues of common interest, including policy issues;
- facilitation of quality-oriented collaboration between countries with common cultural links or historically-similar QA systems;
- training and advisory support to educational stakeholders in the field of QA;
- development of regional methodologies and/or core guidelines for QA and quality evaluation; and
- research into regional QA systems and mechanisms.

International and regional networks model quality promotion and enhancement activities on similar principles to those of their national agency counterparts, with a focus on information dissemination, reflection and research, collaborations and partnerships, and training. Their relevance for this discussion is, first, that they demonstrate convergence on these staples of quality promotion and quality enhancement/capacity building; and second, that they represent a significant resource that national QA agencies need to be prepared to access and utilise as part of their own QA systems design.

3.2 International QP, CD and QE Approaches and the HEQC's QPCD Framework

Table 2 summarises the discussion of national QA systems in Section 3.1, for convenient reference and as a means of extracting key QP and CD/QE elements of these systems, which have been discussed in their wider QA-system context.

The overview suggests that quality promotion is a commonplace of contemporary higher education systems, and has become so since the 1990s – although some QP traditions may date from further back (Philippines, US). QP is conceptually located in two primary contexts: it may be integrally linked to a concern with higher education accountability (Australia, UK, US); or it may be linked to quality enhancement initiatives that supplement quality control mechanisms (Colombia, Finland, India, Philippines). In practice, the two conceptual locations blur in almost all cases, so that QP serves accountability and improvement purposes equally or in unison. This tendency appears natural, as national QA systems all combine accountability and improvement elements; and also constructive, as the focus of QA systems crystallises around continuous improvement necessary to higher education in a globalising world.

There is also blurring in practice with respect to the object of promotion. In some systems, QP appears to have originated in a focus on quality *per se* (Colombia, Philippines, United States). In others, QP has been linked to the emergence of a QE or developmental component of QA and the need to build understanding of that component (evaluation in Finland, assessment and accreditation in India). In other systems, a dedicated QP effort appears to have come to the fore at the time of the wholesale establishment of QA systems and the need to promote QA as well as quality, while the enduring QP focus is much more on quality *per se* (Australia, UK; the same may now be true of Finland and India also). Once again, this evolution seems appropriate, given that the overall objective of QA is continuous improvement, and as QA systems – effectively infrastructure to support continuous improvement – become accepted features of the higher education landscape.

While countries, higher education systems and their national QA systems vary in terms of their state of development, the QA systems of the countries in this sample are primarily oriented around quality enhancement, rather than capacity development. This is so even in developing higher education systems (Colombia, Philippines), where basic capacity for quality higher education delivery and for effective quality management appears to exist in pockets, rather than across the system. Thus, although continuous quality improvement is a central concept in all of these systems, it can be said that a conception of quality, or QA, as

fundamentally transformative tools is sometimes weakly developed.⁸⁵ Accordingly, the achievement of higher education quality and effective QA tend not to be analysed primarily from the perspective of developing capacity for their achievement – and, in some highly-capacitated higher education systems (Australia, UK, US), this is entirely rational. In the sample, there appear to be two exceptions to the general rule: in these systems, capacity development and quality enhancement co-exist as functions of particular kinds of QA activities in higher education systems with particular transformation objectives. Finland, a developed country, has conceptualised evaluation as a critical tool in revitalising and restructuring its higher education system. The promotion of evaluation as a methodology for quality, and the nature of FINHEEC support to evaluation (e.g. evaluation design, training and advice functions) are developmental activities that aim to build capacity for evaluation (in itself, a mandatory process). The end goal of evaluation and FINHEEC activities is quality enhancement to support the renewal of Finnish higher education. In India, NAAC QP and assessment and accreditation activities have been intended both to develop quality, and to enhance quality. This dual conception of the improvement dimension of QA is related to an acknowledged need to transform a huge, complex and diverse higher education system and to improve equity of access in that system. In both these systems, QPCD activities appear to be linked to policy development (FINHEEC's overall evaluations of higher education and advisory links to the Ministry of Education; NAAC's emerging mechanisms of support to state and system policy initiatives), and hence appear to incorporate – or at least to envisage – a dimension of systemic learning and feedback appropriate to higher education transformation.

Although broad approaches to QP and CD/QE are diverse, 'on-the-ground' methodologies used to deliver the approaches have emerged from this analysis as fairly uniform, converging around such elements as training (e.g. of peer evaluators/assessors); dissemination of best practice through guidelines, publications and structured interactions such as seminars; the creation of opportunities for reflective practice and research; forums and networks; and partnerships and linkages. In addition, accreditation processes are in some systems primary QP and QE mechanisms in their own right.

What do these broad observations about QP, CD/QE aspects of other countries' QA systems mean for the development of the HEQC's own QPCD framework?

It is evident that the broad approaches considered in this chapter are contextualised by the higher education systems and the QA systems in which they have evolved. There is no 'one

85 It is true that QE envisages improvement-led innovation, and is concerned with 'transformation' to that extent (see Section 2.1.6). However, it appears that in most cases transformation occurs through incremental change, rather than radical 'step change'.

size fits all' or 'best practice' conceptualisation of QP, CD/QE. Rather models seem to have been constructed in a combination of three ways. First, approaches have been conceptualised *instinctively*, as a response to a higher education (or QA) system's own understanding of what is necessary and possible in context. Second, approaches seem to have developed - at least in part - *mimetically*, through research or observation of what has happened elsewhere. (This process is no doubt supported by international and regional networks and linkages, and may explain some uniformity in methodologies). Finally, the approaches have developed *incrementally*, as national QA systems have developed and as a grasp of the possibilities or priorities of the enterprise has grown. In turn, the conceptualisation of QP, CD/QE approaches appears to have grown richer over time, leading to some quite distinctive contextualised approaches.⁸⁶ As examples:

- Australia's preference for a light-touch approach in the context of a well-capacitated system has led to an annual quality forum that taps QA capacity and good practice for quality enhancement across the system.
- India's ultimate goal of making quality the defining element in a very large and unevenly-capacitated system is leading, over time, to NAAC initiatives that attempt to reach deeply within, and widely across, that system (e.g. QA cells at institutional and at state level).
- In the UK, where QA systems are both well established and well capacitated, a strong QE orientation is developing, both within the QA system (i.e. ELIR process with strong student involvement, in Scotland) and alongside it. Thus, the UK model for QE of teaching and learning represents an advanced conceptualisation of complementary practices in a particular configuration (but one that it is powerfully resourced in ways a South African model probably cannot hope to envisage at this particular stage of its development).

Against this background, the HEQC would appear to have every reason to tailor its own conceptual approach and programme design, and to orient South African higher education's QPCD framework self-referentially in the first instance – i.e. with reference to: the goals of the South African higher education system; its customised definition of quality; and the quality and QA needs of the system, as defined by our own legacy and prevailing context of higher education restructuring. These points of reference would then serve to inform selection of particular strategies, approaches or practices that may have been modelled elsewhere. To this extent, the process of developing a QPCD

⁸⁶ This would seem to lend support to the hypothesis in Section 2.2 that conceptualisation of QP (and other) approaches benefit from intellectual re-evaluation after some years of experience by national QA systems.

framework needs to be much like the process already followed by the HEQC in developing its audit and accreditation frameworks – and would also be consistent with one of the principles for a sustainable system already encountered in this research: local knowledge and reinvention for local purposes are ultimately the tools of choice. International convergence within particular QP and CD/QE methodologies may be helpful in flagging where a core of QPCD initiatives might lie in the South African case, while still leaving considerable space for innovation, adapted to context and resources.

Unfortunately, this research has not managed to penetrate detailed aspects of the organisation of QP and CD/QE initiatives in other countries, or the details of strategies that underpin broadly defined approaches and practices. More fine-grained research and analysis of this kind could be helpful for the development of the QPCD framework in specific instances, once core choices on approach adapted to the HEQC's own context have been made. Analysis of organisational and programmatic detail in the HEQC's own case, based on experience to date, is tackled in the following chapter.

Table 2: Summary of QP, CD and QE Approaches in Selected National QA Systems

	Quality Promotion Orientation	Capacity Development Orientation	Quality Enhancement Orientation	QP, CD/QE Practices	Evaluation of Approach
Australia	<p>✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality promotion and QA promotion 	<p>✗</p>	<p>✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research and reflection into QA and QE - Dissemination of good practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In-built feedback processes of audit (accountability) intended to support QP and QE at system and institutional levels - Annual quality forum - Good practice database - Workshops, seminars, publications, website access to resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - QP conceived in part from market perspective (quality advocacy for external purposes) - 'Light touch' QE approach: strategically selected QE initiatives assume sufficient internal resources for continuous improvement and generation of best practice - Showcasing of good practices a preferred QE approach
Colombia	<p>✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accreditation as a strategy to promote and recognise quality 	<p>✗</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimal CD elements (training for peer evaluators) - Model takes QE as its departure point 	<p>✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Voluntary accreditation process is intended to motivate institutions to a) appropriate a culture of evaluation and b) engage in continuous quality improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Voluntary Accreditation for Excellence process for institutions and undergraduate programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accreditation for Excellence has helped to promote quality - Capacity for optimal participation in the programme has yet to be built (presumably by institutions themselves)
Finland	<p>✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promotion of a culture of evaluation 	<p>✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Articulated focus on development, rather than enhancement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implicitly, not articulated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Programmatic elements of advocacy: research, dissemination, networking - Programmatic elements of CD: evaluation design, general training, advice on implementing evaluations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Model envisages the long-term development of higher education and quality in higher education, through evaluations

	Quality Promotion Orientation	Capacity Development Orientation	Quality Enhancement Orientation	QP, CD/QE Practices	Evaluation of Approach
India	<p>✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAAC charged with making quality the defining element of higher education in India 	<p>✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Articulated need for quality development (complex and diverse system) - NAAC processes seek to be ameliorative and enabling 	<p>✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Articulated need for quality enhancement (complex and diverse system) - UGC supplements quality control mechanisms with quality enrichment mechanisms - NAAC assessment and accreditation process have QE objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessment and accreditation of institutions and units/departments - Strategies to promote assessment and accreditation (consensus building around norms and criteria, awareness programmes, training, partnerships and linkages) - Internal QA Cells in accredited institutions - Efforts to professionalize peer assessors - Efforts to increase stakeholder involvement in QP (e.g student charter) - Analysis of accreditation reports to support policy initiatives at state and system levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Model attempts to combine newer QP/CD/QE elements with older quality control elements, in a complex system with transformation imperatives and challenges - Range of QP strategies is underpinned by articulated developmental goals - NAAC appears to envisage an elaborated approach that would ultimately incorporate QE in institutions, and development of stakeholder and system capacity for quality
Philippines	<p>✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - QP through voluntary, non-governmental accreditation processes for institutions that comply with minimum standards set by government 	<p>✓ (indirect)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Voluntary accreditation utilised as a mechanism for deregulation: capacity for institutional participation in voluntary accreditation processes supported by some grant assistance 	<p>✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - QE through voluntary, non-governmental accreditation processes for institutions that comply with minimum standards set by government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Voluntary, non-governmental accreditation processes for purposes of QE and deregulation - ISO certification being introduced as a complementary basis for QP and benchmarking higher education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accreditation has had limited impact - Revitalised QP and QE strategies being sought, especially in light of globalisation of higher education

	Quality Promotion Orientation	Capacity Development Orientation	Quality Enhancement Orientation	QP, CD/QE Practices	Evaluation of Approach
UK	<p>✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - QP by QAA emphasises publicly-available information - QAA promotes continuous improvement in QA/QM at institutional level 	<p>✓ (indirect)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capacity for audit and review was built by QAA in England prior to initiation of audit 	<p>✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - QE conceptualised as continuous improvement in QA/QM, and implicit throughout QA processes - QA in Scotland is explicitly QE-led - Elements in UK higher education complementary to QA system seek to consolidate a focus on QE in teaching and learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development by QAA of 'academic infrastructure' as nationally-agreed reference points for QA - Published audit and review reports, working papers to highlight good practice - QAA liaison schemes and networks - Higher Education Academy brings together a range of QE initiatives in the area of teaching and learning, to complement QA approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - QAA mixes QA accountability elements with QP and QE elements - QE, reflective practice and research in teaching and learning are encouraged by initiatives complementary to the national QA system
US	<p>✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Triad of complementary QA/QP roles held by federal and state governments, and decentralised accrediting agencies, appears to have fostered a strong culture of internal quality review informed by academic perspectives 	<p>✗</p>	<p>✓</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accreditation processes appear to have fostered the development of strong academic planning, educational innovation and a culture of continuous improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Periodic collegial self-review and peer review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Culture of continuous improvement has been institutionalised through long traditions of collegial self-review and peer review - While accreditation systems appear to have been adequately effective and reliable, some are seeking a greater measure of federal control over academic quality