

STUDENT QUALITY LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

The knowledge economy and other contemporary realities in developed countries have underlined the importance of higher education institutions as agents for socio-economic transmission and transformation in the 21st century. Most of these institutions have dramatically increased their participation rate to 20%, while others are aspiring for 40%. Developing countries are also attempting to increase their participation rates in order to participate more effectively globally. An increased demand is a worldwide tendency in higher education.

This demand has been met with an increased supply by means of the development of new information technologies, growth of public and private provision and increased cross- and trans-border provision of higher education. This has widened access to and choice of higher education institutions and programmes. However, the demand also increased the risk of students being exposed to poor quality higher education. Many so-called 'fly by night' institutions or 'degree mills' have emerged, which capitalise on the demand for higher education.

The situation is aggravated by the concomitant problem of student illiteracy about higher education. False claims are often made about institutions, the quality of their programmes and their accreditation status, to which ill-informed students fall prey. There is a need for students to be empowered in order to evaluate the accuracy of claims and to make informed decisions about institutions and programmes. Students need to know what constitutes quality higher education institutions and quality programmes. Apart from students, quality literacy is also becoming increasingly important for employers and the general public.

The UNESCO brief for this paper includes:

1. A desktop study mapping of existing tools for informing students on quality on higher education provision worldwide.
2. A strategy for developing tools for empowering students to make informed decisions to evaluate the learning experiences offered by higher education level. This strategy should include key questions concerning the learning experience and status of the institution and lessons learnt from the experiences of South Africa in developing quality literacy for students.

This study will propose a possible framework for developing quality literacy among potential and other students in South African higher education. The framework is informed by approaches and strategies which have been successfully implemented in some other countries. The study has certain limitations. It has been largely restricted to a desktop search via the Internet and only English websites were searched. Examples include little information directly from higher education institutions, but all full members of the International Network for Quality assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) have been approached for information and analyses have been made of some articles and manuals. Apart from this, quality literacy has until recently not directly formed part of the author's responsibilities at the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa.

DEFINING QUALITY LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT

Quality literacy and empowerment builds to a large extent on the ability to effectively deal with information, i.e. information literacy. According to Norgaard (2003), information literacy is geared towards accessing, evaluating and using information within larger cultural, historical, social, economic and political systems. It should not be seen as a reductive function or in performance terms, but more as a skill, whether in the library or on the Internet. A robust sense of information literacy has at the heart evaluative and integrative concerns, i.e. how we judge and evaluate information and integrates it into effective communication. One can, therefore, argue that in order for students to access and make judgements about information about quality, they need to have a proper understanding of information literacy.

First-time student entrants need to make informed decisions about the quality of institutions and programmes, which entails an evaluation of the available information. Is the information about institutions, programmes and quality assurance agencies reliable, accurate and legitimate? Is the institution legitimate or a 'degree and accreditation mill'? How can one know whether a programme is of a good quality and not a just a quick money-making scheme?

It is crucial for students to acquire quality literacy skills to access, evaluate and use information about quality in order to make informed decisions about the choice of an institution and/or programme. Quality literacy for students entails the following aspects:

1. Awareness of how the higher education institution and programmes work.
2. Understanding what can be expected of a quality higher education institution and programme.
3. Using quality related information to inform judgements and decisions about the quality of an institution and/or programme.
4. Knowing how student opinion can best be heard and used in respect of the quality of institutions and programmes.

Quality empowerment entails the concept of agency - the ability not only to participate in but also to shape education. The quality of teaching and learning, for example, is shaped by engagements between the lecturer and the student. Students are equally responsible to shape the quality of their learning experiences. Empowered

students have the ability not only to make the correct choices with regard to institutions and programmes, but also to play a positive role in promoting and enhancing the quality of education processes and outcomes.

2. TWO APPROACHES TO QUALITY LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1 The approach of the HEQC (South Africa)

Higher education is regarded in developing countries as an important agent for class mobilisation or improving the financial viability of families. Many students come from financially destitute backgrounds and many families take huge loans to pay student fees. Choosing a poor quality or even illegitimate higher education institution and programme means greater poverty enslavement, not only for the student but also for his / her family, since after completing such a qualification, the student could find it hard to enter the labour market and to recover the expenses incurred by studying. Uninformed decisions on quality have potentially devastating effects on family survival in these conditions.

In South Africa, as in many other developing countries, local and foreign private provision has increased with the liberalisation of higher education. Apart from an increasing number of legitimate private providers, many so-called 'fly-by-night' institutions have emerged to capitalise on the demand for higher education. A considerable number of students come from rural areas and are the first generation to attend higher education, many of whom are ill-informed about higher education and totally unaware of quality measures. Especially overseas qualifications from developed countries are often seen as 'tickets' to quality and transnational mobility to jobs and labor markets in the industrialised countries.

Recruitment of students is primarily done through advertisements in the South African mass media, particularly the print media (newspapers). These advertisements often do not indicate whether the programmes advertised are higher education or at the further education level. They often do not provide information on whether the institution, as required by law, is registered with the Department of National Education (DoE) or has its qualification registered by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Some adverts deliberately mislead students about their accreditation status and international standing as far as quality is concerned.

On account of various complaints received from prospective students and the public, the HEQC, which is the national body in South Africa responsible for quality assurance in higher education, undertook some research and embarked in January 2002 with the DoE on an information campaign to inform the public and to provide prospective students with more information in order to protect themselves from unscrupulous and illegal providers.

A plan was also developed to identify legal and illegal providers. The mass media (both radio and print media) were used to mobilise a national information campaign which targeted first time higher education entrants. Information was developed and distributed about the national quality assurance system and how to recognise legal providers of higher education. The first supplement was distributed through a

newspaper that targeted every high school in country. Thereafter, for a period of two months, adverts in national newspapers were scrutinised and analysed. It was found that misleading advertising had decreased, and those institutions that continued the practice were instructed to stop. Unfortunately, these measures were not adequate and regulations had to be developed so that defaulters could be prosecuted.

The HEQC is still actively monitors advertisements and has developed good practice guides and protocols for advertising. Workshops have been conducted to help legal institutions improve their ethical practice in advertising and SAQA has also developed advertising protocols, particularly the use of the SAQA logo. A second supplement was developed in the form of a poster and distributed nationally targeting first-time entrants, the focus again being student literacy in quality and their right to quality higher education. An attempt was also made to demystify basic concepts about qualifications, quality assurance and accreditation. The distribution of the supplements was supported by radio interviews in different official languages, which were conducted during periods when youth listenership was the highest, particularly when top-twenty pop music shows were aired.

The HEQC's observation is that prospective students are nowadays more aware of the difference between a legal and illegal provider of higher education. However, the recent public release of the accreditation results of the national reviews of MBA's has shown that students and the general public still misunderstand the concept of accreditation and quality assurance, which clearly indicates that more work has to be done to demystify these concepts, amongst others. The huge interest and debate that the national review created in the mass media has promoted a greater awareness and understanding of accreditation and quality assurance.

The public release of the MBA results had negative repercussions for the reputations of those institutions that lost accreditation for their MBA's. These institutions released public statements that attacked the credibility of the national review and accreditation. Such attacks are potentially dangerous and misleading, particularly when students and the general public do not yet have a thorough understanding of accreditation and quality assurance, given the fact that the national quality assurance system is still relatively new. This underlines the need for active student education about quality literacy and the involvement of students in quality assurance at institutional level. Institutions are responsible to develop and give students opportunities to be more actively involved in quality assurance.

The HEQC is currently reviewing its current information campaign and plans to develop a new approach along the lines of a quality literacy and empowerment approach which will be outlined in Section 4 below. The new approach will seek new strategies to empower students to actively participate in assessing and shaping quality at institutional levels.

2.2 Council for Higher Education Accreditation

In the USA, deliberate attempts have been made by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to target first-time entrants and the general public and inform them about quality assurance in higher education. CHEA also developed guidelines for institutions and national accrediting agencies about information that could be used

by first-time entrants, employers or the general public. More recently (March, May 2004), CHEA produced two important publications in the area of student quality literacy and information, viz. Balancing competing goods, accreditation and information to the public about quality and accreditation (a letter from the President); and Provision of additional information to the public about institution and programme performance.

In the President's letter, three questions are identified as important for students. These include:

- a) How does accreditation work? This is important since institutions use accreditation information extensively in advertising and recruitment drives. Such information needs to be demystified for students so that they can critically evaluate it. This should include clarifying what accreditation is, how it works, what is accredited, why accreditation is important and who the accreditors are.
- b) What are the strengths and weaknesses of institutions or programmes in which the student is interested? Students need to make a decision and choose an institution and programme based on credible information about institutional and programme performance. A summary report should be available to students that state the results of the accreditation process, programme strengths, areas that need improvement, and quality of service in relation to students.
- c) What skills and capacity can enrollment in the institution help the student achieve? Students need to know about the competencies they will develop in the programme and how these will prepare them for the future.

Examples of written responses to the above questions are available in the publication.

The second publication deals with questions that quality assurance agencies should consider when embarking on quality literacy and information campaigns. These include:

- a) What kinds of information about quality are accreditors uniquely positioned to provide to the students?
- b) What vehicles could be used to expand information to students?
- c) How much information should be made available to students?
- d) What are the intended and unintended consequences of releasing information?

Both publications provide useful guidelines to develop information campaigns to promote quality literacy among higher education students.

2.3 Moving from information campaigns to better decision-making

The HEQC and the CHEA approaches have used information campaigns in an attempt to make students more literate about quality. The same approach is followed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which requires institutions to make data about their performance available on their websites. This data is verified by QAA when institutions have their external review or audit.

However, using only information campaigns has clear limitations, since it entails only one aspect of quality literacy, namely the supply of information. The misunderstandings which became apparent on the part of students and institutions during the review of MBA's in South Africa, highlighted the inadequacy of this approach. In order to attain real quality literacy, students need to be empowered also to evaluate the legitimacy of information claims and make informed decisions about quality. This will enable prospective students to make an informed choice with regard to institutions and programmes. Students who are already in programmes will be enabled to evaluate, enhance and promote the quality of the programme for which they are enrolled. More educative processes are clearly needed to promote real quality literacy and empowerment.

3. THE ROLE OF STUDENTS IN ASSURING AND PROMOTING QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Students clearly want and even demand quality higher education, but are they central to quality assurance, improvement and promotion? Does their need for quality make them important role-players in this regard? If yes, do higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies adequately recognise the role of students in quality assurance, improvement and promotion? If yes, how and when do they involve them?

Teaching and learning, research and community engagement are core functions of higher education. However, the enhancement and empowerment of students as participants in the learning process is crucial. Harvey (1996) argues that students as participants should to be -

- Enhanced through the provision of an educational experience that enables the development of a continued improvement of knowledge, abilities and skills.
- Empowered not just to select their own curriculum, nor to monitor the quality of the service they are provided, nor even to construct their own contract – as valuable as all these things might be – but empowered as critical and transformative thinkers.

Students are core participants in higher education and have a definite stake in the learning process. They are, therefore, central to shaping and assessing the quality of the learning process and higher education in general. Although external monitoring of quality does play a role, but it could be conservative and driven by accountability requirements, and not focus on real improvement of the teaching and learning process. Moreover, it is difficult for an external agency to effect direct improvement of the learning process, because external monitoring typically takes place periodically for only a limited period (3 – 5 days once in four or five years). Students are ever present and could make a real contribution to the improvement of quality, if allowed and empowered to participate in the process.

How should students then be involved and how does this contribute to quality literacy and empowerment? In the literature, three main approaches to student involvement could be discerned, which are either used individually or in combinations.

3.1 Student feedback approach

In the feedback approach, students are seen as recipients of services and are surveyed about the quality of these services. Students are not viewed as active shapers and assessors of quality, and are consequently disempowered from providing an active input into quality at institutional or national levels. In most cases, their involvement is passive and voluntarist, and not regarded as a right.

Most developing countries, where quality assurance is relatively new, are lagging behind in terms of a deliberate strategy on student empowerment in regard to quality. This is ironical, since these countries have the greatest need, given the rapid expansion of higher education and proliferation of unscrupulous. Even in countries like India where the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has practised quality assurance for a decade, student involvement was foreign, contentious and viewed with suspicion. The unreliability of student feedback and the competence of students to provide meaningful feedback are some of the aspects mentioned by institutions in this regard (Shyamasundar and Stella, 2002).

In some developed countries, student feedback is becoming more important in assessing quality, but there is little standardisation in how it is collected or, perhaps more significantly, what is done with it (Harvey, 2002; Williams 2002). In Britain student, feedback has been recognised by the QAA as a central pillar on which to build any future quality assurance policy. The student is now recognised as the principal role-player of any higher education institution and a voice that should be listened to and acted upon, in order to enhance quality in total learning experience (Williams, 2002).

One model of a full feedback action cycle is the ‘Student Satisfaction Approach’ developed by Harvey for the University of Central England and now adopted by many institutions in Britain. The model entails a full cycle of data collection, reporting and action that enables management to make improvements that are directly informed by student concerns. The constituent elements of the model include the following:

- There is an important relationship between the student’s environment and learning, and evaluation of the total learning environment is necessary.
- The learning environment should be surveyed through questionnaires and focus group discussions.
- Student identity is confidential.
- Students rate patterns of the use of facilities should be taken into consideration.
- Findings from surveys have to be acted on by management.
- Students have to be informed of action that has resulted in the expression of their views.
- Student feedback and results should be published and transparency and openness encouraged.
- Reporting should be done in accessible ways so that students find it understandable.

The student feedback model assumes that students have a right to quality education and should act responsibly to ensure their optimum participation in their education. The rights of students are enshrined at institutional level by having mandatory

academic appeals and student complaints regulatory and procedural frameworks. The QAA's code of practice for higher education institutions in Britain is underpinned by the following principles:

- Institutions should have effective procedures for resolving student complaints and academic appeals. Students should have a full opportunity to raise, individually or collectively, matters of proper concern to them without fear of disadvantage and in the knowledge that privacy and confidentiality will be respected.
- The procedures should be ratified by the governing body or other body with ultimate corporate responsibility and should form a part of the institution's overall framework for quality assurance.
- Institutions should ensure that their procedures are fair and decisions are reasonable and have regard to any applicable law.
- Institutions should address student complaints and appeals in a timely manner, using simple and transparent procedures. Informal resolution should be an option at all stages of the complaints procedure, which should operate, in the first instance, at the level at which the matter arose.

3.2 Student rights approach

The student rights approach regards the involvement of students in quality issues as part of their legal rights. The Jontiem conference saw all UNESCO countries commit themselves to providing universal literacy by enshrining the right of their citizens to access to quality basic education. Many countries have enshrined this as a constitutional right of every primary school learner and made the necessary resources available. However, no similar constitutional right exists for higher education, possibly because most countries, including well-endowed ones, do not have the necessary resources to give practical effect to it.

It could be argued that the right of students to quality higher education is guaranteed indirectly through the legal mandate of national quality assurance agencies. Most national agencies have, however, resisted using national legal frameworks to protect individual students from poor quality higher education. Apparently, only the legal framework in the USA entitles students to claim back fees from the fidelity fund if programs are de-accredited.

It is also often argued that the rights of students cannot be recognised without students recognising their responsibilities as well. Students are regarded as equally responsible for creating conducive learning and teaching conditions by participating constructively in the learning process. They need to co-operate and ensure they give off their best and participate actively in the classroom and campus life. This approach is developed in a publication by the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, titled *Universities and their students: Principles for provision of education by Australian universities*. Some institutions have adopted a student rights and responsibilities charter and have used information campaigns and workshops to embed the charter within the institution. It is problematic, however, that the student rights and responsibilities do not extend beyond the institutional level.

A case could be made for countries or national quality agencies to explore possibilities of enshrining student rights to quality education through legal

frameworks or ombudsman approaches. This seems to have the best possibility of enshrining students' rights to quality higher education, even if students are transient. The ombudsman approach, for example, the establishment of consumer councils to protect consumers from unscrupulous traders or providers of service, uses a mediation framework and not a court of law to settle disputes, and tends to be efficient, fair and less costly than using legal frameworks.

The major disadvantage of both approaches is that it undermines the collegial governance of institutions. It may accelerate litigation, reduce innovation and promote greater uniformity and compliance with safe tried and tested approaches within institutions. Moreover, it treats higher education as a commodity and students as consumers and advances the individual rights rather than the collective rights of social groups or the public good.

Questions that need to be answered with regard to the legal rights approach are the following:

- Is this approach suitable for higher education?
- If yes, should legal enshrinement be limited to institutional level only or should it involve the national level as well?
- Is it more appropriate for developing countries, where national quality assurance systems are underdeveloped?
- Is the national ombudsman approach a quicker and cheaper way to protect students from unscrupulous providers?

3.3 Students as co-constructors approach

Although the student feedback model and student rights approach take student views seriously, students are still seen as consumers or clients that have to be satisfied with "educational services" provided. They are not active participants and co-constructors that are empowered to shape the quality of the education process at institutions. Although the QAA, for example, has endeavoured to increase the participation of students during the external audit of institutions and has drawn up a guide for student representatives, including course representatives and students' union officers, students are themselves not encouraged to review and shape the quality of the institution.

A more promising approach is that taken by the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB), which sees students as active shapers and assessors of quality i.e. co-constructors of quality. Students are regarded as co-constructors of the quality of their classroom learning experience and campus life within a national and international framework. The ESIB has launched a major initiative to improve quality assurance processes and student involvement in:

- Collecting, analysing and disseminating theory, good practice and student involvement in quality assurance in Europe, focusing on well-developed and less developed quality assurance systems.
- Raising awareness of the importance of student involvement in quality assurance processes.
- Identifying and promoting European-wide strategies to involve student organisation in quality assurance.

- Promoting co-operation of European student organisations on themes of the Bologna process.

The main activities of the ESIB include the following:

- Production of a European Handbook on Quality assurance for local and national student representatives.
- Distribution of checklists and guidelines to indicate to stakeholders and policymakers what students find important concerning quality education.
- Organising an expert meeting of European student representatives as European experts on quality assurance.
- Development of a training course for members of ESIB to distribute ideas about improving quality of higher education.

The ESIB has also published a manual and guide that covers definitions of quality assurance, origins of quality assurance at a European and international levels, comparative analyses of national quality assurance systems, student involvement in quality assurance, and the future of quality assurance. The guide gives students a broad understanding of quality assurance, how students should participate in quality assurance of institutions and programmes and the methods to ensure positive involvement.

The ESIB initiative is the only concerted continent-wide attempt to improve student agency in quality assurance by students for students and could act as a model for other continents and national quality assurance agencies and student organisations. Questions that need to be answered are the following:

- How could an initiative, similar to that of the ESIB, be expanded to countries where national quality assurance frameworks exist or cases where they are in early developmental stages?
- What role should student organisations and national quality assurance agencies play in promoting student involvement and empowerment in quality assurance?

4. FRAMEWORK FOR STUDENT LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

4.1 Introduction and points of departure

In developing a framework for student quality literacy and empowerment, one has to proceed from the premise that the particular educational history and context of a country, including the legacy of student involvement in quality, should shape the approach each country should use. With regard to South Africa, some of the questions that need to be answered with regard to the development of a framework for student literacy and empowerment are the following:

- How can student quality literacy and empowerment be effectively introduced in South Africa -
 - Within its particular socio-political context?

- Given the unequal quality of provision among higher education institutions?
- Given the state of development and implementation of quality assurance in higher education?
- Given the fact that the process of student quality literacy and empowerment has already begun?
- Which of the three approaches of student involvement in quality issues outlined in Section 3 above would be most appropriate, or which combinations of approaches?
- Should quality literacy and empowerment be directed initially only at first-time entrants into higher education or at students already enrolled in programmes, or at both groups simultaneously?

In addressing these questions, it should be considered that most students in developing countries are the first generation to participate in higher education and consequently need more information about quality, whereas in developed countries students are often faced with an overload of information. A framework for student quality literacy and empowerment in South Africa should make provision for an adequate flow of information and also provide training in order to deal with the information supplied.

Prospective students need quality literacy and empowerment in order to select an institution and a programme. Training workshops for student representatives from high schools could be undertaken by national quality assurance agencies in partnership with the DoE and national school counselors associations. Current students, on the other hand, should ensure they are getting optimal quality from the programme they are studying and should contribute to enhancing and promoting the quality of the programme. A framework for student quality literacy and empowerment should make provision for differentiated student needs.

Involvement of current students in quality and quality assurance should ideally include all three approaches outlined above, viz. student feedback, student rights and responsibilities; and students as co-constructors. Involvement of current students in quality issues should be pursued at both the institutional and national levels and programmes to enhance one or more of these approaches could be undertaken at by appropriate role players like the HEQC, institutions themselves, student representative councils and student administrators.

4.2 Aspects of the framework for student quality literacy and empowerment

4.2.1 Role-players and functions

The relevant role-players and their functions in student quality literacy and empowerment were briefly discussed in Section 4.1 above. Table 1 provides an overview of these in more detail:

STUDENT QUALITY LITERACY AND EMPOWERMENT							
	Prospective students		Current students				
	Quality literacy and empowerment		Quality literacy and empowerment		Practices of quality assurance, enhancement and promotion		
	Information campaign and access to quality related information	Training to evaluate and make decisions based on quality related information	Information campaign and access to quality related information	Training to evaluate programmes, enhance and promote programme quality	Student feedback on quality	Student rights and responsibilities regarding quality	Students as co-constructors of quality
HEQC							
Higher education institutions							
DoE							
School counsellors associations							
Student representative councils							
Student administrators							
Student recruitment organisations							
Institutional student support services							
SAUVCA, CTP and APPETD							

(i) Prospective students and quality literacy and empowerment

Prospective students need information to take decisions about institutional and programme choice. South Africa has to respond to this need, especially in view of the great demand but limited understanding of higher education on the part of many students. At the minimum, an information campaign should be undertaken and all relevant support structures should be involved to improve understanding and decision-making on the part of these students. The programme which has to be developed for quality literacy and empowerment of prospective students should consider the following aspects:

- Accurate and valid information should be provided on institutions and programmes which is linked to careers, including quality, costs, geographic location, institutional culture and life, application and entry procedures, fees, etc., before students can make an informed choice.
- How could prospective students be helped to verify the information? How can they be empowered to make right choices? What strategies could be used to disseminate information and educate students on how to use the information? Who can execute these strategies? How are these strategies implemented in resource strapped developing countries? What are the roles and functions of high schools, higher education institutions, professional councils, career counseling and national quality assurance agencies? How can the mass media be used, particularly radio and newspaper in developing countries?
- All information and claims made by institutions need not be reliable or accurate – who regulates and watches the accuracy of information and what happens when there are disputes or inaccuracies? Is there a need for a regulatory framework like a consumer watch council that protects consumers? What should the role of national quality assurance agencies be in this regard?
- Information about the national system of higher education and quality assurance measures should be available to students and their parents. Information should include the following:
 - Institutional policies and procedures for quality assurance.
 - The national quality assurance system for higher education.
 - The accreditation status of programmes and audit information

(ii) Increasing the involvement of current students in quality issues

Three approaches to student involvement in quality issues are available, viz. student feedback, student rights and student as co-constructors of quality. All three approaches could be used simultaneously or individually, depending on contextual factors of the institution or country. In cases where no national quality assurance systems exists, it will be difficult to use one of these approaches, except if institutions desire to pursue one of these. If a national system has been established, it may be appropriate to encourage the feedback approach and consider the student rights approach at the institutional level as part of codes of good practice. In cases where there is a strong history of student feedback and a robust and well established national quality assurance system, it may be more appropriate to consider the students as co-constructors approach for implementation.

Whatever, approach is considered, at least the following topics need to be considered as part of student involvement in quality issues:

- Legislative framework for higher education.
- Quality assurance and terminology (accreditation and audit).
- Quality related information about institutions and programmes
- Recruitment and admissions.
- Fees and charges.
- Financial aid.
- Employment and placement services.
- Housing and Residential Life.
- Health Services.
- Tutorial Support Services.
- Peer help/orientation for first years.
- Sports/ recreation/intramurals
- Student associations/class Representatives
- Library/computer and Internet support/ campus bookshop
- Academic development/social and health skills development
- Disability services
- Learning facilities
- Psychological and counseling services
- Postgraduate supervision
- Student involvement in programme development; evaluating the implementation of the curriculum; and summative evaluation of programme.
- Student rights around assessment and examinations practices.
- Student responsibilities and rights

4.2 Strategies to encourage student literacy and empowerment

The following basic strategies are proposed as part of the framework for student quality literacy and empowerment:

- Information Campaigns – multimedia campaigns within and outside campus by presented by institutions and national agencies using fact sheets, frequently asked questions (FAQs), posters, brochures, advertisements, information packs, displays (traveling and static), etc. These campaigns have to be thoroughly planned and targeted to a specific audiences in order to maximise their effectiveness.
- Training workshops – to actively involve students to increase their understanding about quality, their participation in quality assurance activities and their assessment of quality at institutional levels.
- Research and Development aimed at student empowerment in quality. Some of the possible research questions have been posed in this paper. There is a desperate need to increase the research in this area.
- Development of Good Practice Guides which include a review of quality assurance systems, instruments, processes of involvement, mobilising and widening the involvement of other students.

4.3 Involvement of other Stakeholders

Besides students themselves, other stakeholders should be encouraged to participate in developing and implementing student quality literacy and empowerment strategies. These include student organisations (global, regional, national and institutional),

student support organisations (for example, student recruitment associations, national student support services, institutional level support services, national student administrators associations, etc.), regional and international bodies like UNESCO and INQAAHE, national and regional vice-chancellors associations, national quality assurance agencies and the DoE.

5. THE NEXT STEPS

It is important to share information on experiences with regard to student quality literacy and empowerment. In practice, little has been done in this regard within and across countries, except for the student feedback approach where many research projects, manuals and guides to good practice are available. The other areas of student quality literacy and empowerment that this paper has identified are still in the early stages of development and very little research has been conducted and/or shared within and across countries. It is therefore essential to encourage the establishment of working groups in each country as well as internationally. INQAAHE and UNESCO could play a major role to enable sharing of information, identification of good practice, undertaking of research and development of capacity and expertise.

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The HEQC, together with other national student support structures such as the National Association of Student Development Practitioners, and National Student Organisations is busy developing a plan and programme to address student involvement in quality assurance.