Proceedings of Workshop to Share the Experiences on Quality Assurance Activities in Universities

Quality Assurance & Accreditation Council of the UGC

18 July 2014, UGC Auditorium

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A workshop was held to share the experiences on quality assurance activities in universities, on 18 July 2014 at the UGC Auditorium. There were participants from 15 state-run universities: 14 universities under the UGC and the Kotelawala Defence University. The full list of participants and their contact information is shown in Annex 1.

The day's proceedings began with the lighting of the traditional oil lamp by the Chairperson, UGC, Prof Kshanika Hirimburegama and other dignitaries. This was followed by the welcome address and opening remarks delivered by the Chairperson UGC, who highlighted the importance of quality assurance in the universities. The Vice-Chairman, UGC, Prof Ranjith Senaratne, then spoke briefly on the role of the UGC in improving the quality of higher education. This was followed by a presentation made by the Acting Director of the QAA Council of the UGC, Prof Colin Peiris, on "The Sri Lanka Qualification Framework and its Application in Higher Education". The detailed presentation is shown in Annex 2. During the discussion that followed the presentation, the need for some further amendments of the SLQF pathways was highlighted, particularly the need to clarify the position of the MBBS degree.

The second session for the day began with a presentation by Prof Uma Coomaraswamy, former Vice-Chancellor of the Open University of Sri Lanka, on "Integrating internal quality assurance and external quality assurance" (shown as Annex 3). During the ensuing discussion, the best means of reinforcing internal quality assurance through external quality assurance activities were discussed.

This session was followed by short presentations from each university, on their QA activities to date. The individual presenters were as follows, in order of presentation:

1. University of Jaffna: Prof Srisatkunarajah

2. University of Ruhuna: (Annex 4)

3. University of Visual and Performing Arts: Dr Chandragupta Thenuwara

4. Eastern University of Sri Lanka: Dr M Pagthinathan (Annex 5)

5. University of Kelaniya: Prof N R de Silva (Annex 6)

6. Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka: Dr S J M N G Samarakoon (Annex 7)

7. University of Peradeniya: Prof S K Hennayake (Annex 8)

8. Kotelawala Defence University: Prof N Warnasuriya

9. University of Moratuwa: Prof R A Attalage (Annex 9)

10. Wayamba University of Sri Lanka: Dr. Renuka Silva (Annex 10)

11. University of Sri Jayewardenepura: Prof Samanthi Senaratne (Annex 11)

12. South Eastern University of Sri Lanka: Dr A Jahfer

13. Open University of Sri Lanka: Prof Thusitha Jayasuriya (Annex 12)

14. University of Colombo: Prof Manouri Senanayake (Annex 13)

15. Rajarata University of Sri Lanka: Prof Aruni Weerasinghe

The presentations showed that the majority of universities now have functional Internal Quality Assurance Units. Most have mainly facilitated EQA activities but several have undertaken other QA activities within their institutions. The need to give Internal Quality Assurance Units a stronger mandate for implementation of QA activities within each university was discussed, especially the possibility of doing this through a circular letter issued by the UGC.

In the post-lunch session, participants were divided into groups for discussion of their views on 6 different topics in relation to quality assurance (see Annex 14 for list of members in each group). In the last session for the day, the views of the group were presented and discussed in plenary. The topics for discussion, the chairpersons and presenters of each group are as follows:

Group	Topic	Chairperson	Presenter	Annex
1	Where does leadership rest?	Prof N Warnasuriya	Dr Manoranjana Herath	15
2	Role of academics in QA	Mr C Thenuwara	Mr C Thenuwara, Dr R Marasinghe	16
3	Who should be the champions for QA?	Prof S Srisatkunarajah	Dr W A R Seneviratne	17
4	How can internal QA gain buy-in and acceptance from staff?	Prof R A Attalage	Ms Irosha Chandrasekara	18
5	Guidelines for internal QA in universities	Prof T Mahendrany	Dr Gayathri Jayathilake	19
6	Change of attitudes in university students	Prof N de Silva	Prof N de Silva	20

Group 1 was of the view that overall leadership should lie with the Vice-Chancellor and the Deans at the Faculty levels. However, it was felt that a senior academic who is widely respected and accepted by the staff and students should be at the helm of QA activities. He should be preferably but not necessarily be a Professor, whose academic credentials,

integrity and work ethic are widely accepted by the University community. Other qualities that characterize such a person were also described by this group.

Group 2 discussed the role of academics in quality assurance. They were of the view that this includes teaching learning activities and assessments as well as research, administration and other commitments.

Group 3 was of the view that champions for QA should engage in excellent and innovative practice and in efficient execution of QA activities. Team work is very important, while leadership should be competent and able. There should be a culture and tradition of QA, that establishes policies and procedures that promote QA.

Group 4 was of the view that in order to gain buy-in for QA, there should be recognition of Internal Quality Assurance Units within HEIs. The QA Director should be a full time member or there should be a part time Director supported by a fulltime Scientific Officer. Infrastructure facilities should be developed, with permanent cadre positions and recognition of the link between Departments + Faculty + IQAU. The corporate goals of the university should be aligned with QA goals.

In discussing guidelines for internal QA, Group 5 recommended that each HEI should have policy and procedures for the assurance of quality and standards of their own programmes and awards. Seven main aspects that should be covered by the internal QA process were discussed.

In discussing the need to change students' attitudes, Group 6 presented their view of an ideal student, the perceived problems with students' attitudes and how it might be possible to change attitudes in order to mitigate the problems.

After closing remarks from Prof Colin Peiris, and a vote of thanks from Ms. Janadari Wijesinghe, Assistant Secretary, UGC, the day's proceedings ended with singing of the National Anthem.

Recommendations

1. Review the current SLQF document with a view to providing clearer details of the pathways and the position of the MBBS degree

2. Provide Internal Quality Assurance Units a stronger mandate for implementation of QA activities within each university, through a circular letter issued by the UGC. This should describe the role of the institution's Director / QA, desirable internal QA activities and other changes that would promote QA within a HEI.

List of Annexures