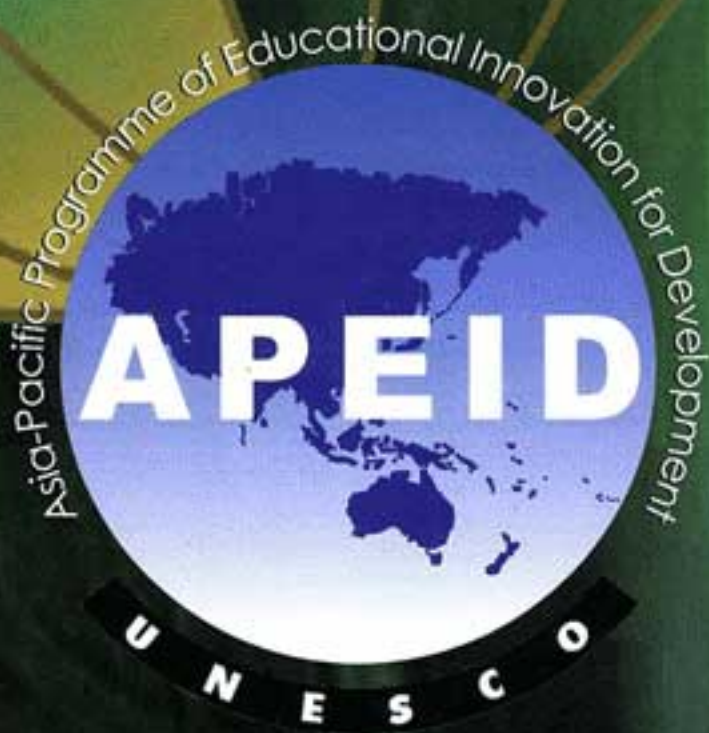


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Approaches to Quality Assurance and Mutual Recognition of Qualifications

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and Cultural Organization
UNESCO Bangkok



**APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSURANCE AND
MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS**

(BASED ON SELECTED CASE STUDIES OF GUNI-AP MEMBERSHIP)

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List of Abbreviations

APQN – Asia Pacific Quality Network

CBE – Cross Border Education

GUNI - Global University Network for Innovation

GUNI-AP - Global University Network for Innovation - Asia and the Pacific

HEI – Higher Education Institution

ICT - Information and Communication Technology

MR – Mutual Recognition

NAAC - National Assessment and Accreditation Council

OECD – Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

QA - Quality Assurance

QAA – Quality Assurance Agency

RM – Ringgit Malaysia

UI - National University of Indonesia

UKM - Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UPC - Technical University of Catalonia

WCHE - World Conference on Higher Education

ZU - Zhejiang University (People’s Republic of China)

**APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSURANCE AND
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(BASED ON SELECTED CASE STUDIES OF THE GUNI-AP MEMBERSHIP)

Executive Summary

The largest of the UNESCO regions in terms of both area and population, the Asia-Pacific region is characterised by cultural, linguistic, social, political and economic diversities. Amidst the diversity in terms of development stage, geographic coverage, the nature of the societies encompassed, prosperity levels, population sizes, and political frameworks, the higher education systems of the region do display certain commonalities in responding to the impact of globalization. In 2003, the Follow-up Report to the World Conference on Higher Education of Asia and the Pacific noted that the Asia-Pacific region was going through a period of rapid and far-reaching economic and social change, driven particularly by the impact of accelerating globalization, increased international economic competition and the transition from traditional to knowledge-based economies and often market-oriented systems. These changes continue to date and they provide higher education with many challenges, the major one being the move towards “knowledge-based or knowledge societies”.

Access to information and knowledge increasingly determines opportunities for development. Indeed, knowledge has become the principal force of social transformation and that is one of the reasons why the concept of “knowledge societies,” is gaining much attention. To build knowledge societies and benefit from them, the higher education institutions (HEIs) have to respond in a variety of ways – this paper tries to capture the commonalities and diversities that are found among these responses in quality related issues, based on select cases of the Asia-Pacific region. These cases were discussed under the auspices of the Global University Network for Innovation - Asia and the Pacific (GUNI-AP) in September 2004.

Responses to Quality Assurance and Mutual Recognition

For a better understanding of the case studies, we need to look at the institutional responses in the background of the national context.

Changes in the National Context

In all the eight countries of the founding group, in the last two decades there have been major changes at the national level. The following are the significant ones.

i) Higher education as a priority: The Task Force on Higher Education and Society which was co-convened by the UNESCO and the World Bank in 1997 and whose report was issued in 2000, states that higher education “is to a knowledge economy as primary education is to an agrarian economy and secondary education is to an industrial economy”. Many countries of Asia and the Pacific have responded positively to this trend. Especially the period after nineties indicates rapid and impressive growth in student enrolments and expansion in higher education provisions. In addition to specific strategies by the governments to increase student enrolment in higher education, many other factors such as higher output from secondary schools, greater participation of women in higher education, and a growing private sector demand for graduates seem to contribute to this trend.

ii) Changes in pattern of governance: The emergence of a new paradigm in higher education management with emphasis on decentralization, allowing each unit to function more independently within an overall central authority, could be noted. Its implementation is found in the form of freedom for HEIs to plan and develop their educational programmes and to be responsible for them. It is a combination of autonomy and accountability that influences the mechanisms of quality assurance – internal and external – in various ways.

iii) Changing pattern of finance: While there has been a significant increase in enrolment in HEIs, it has not been matched by a proportionate increase in public funding. The hesitation of governments to fund higher education institutions was at one time influenced by the policy stand that higher education was a private good. Today, although this perception stands corrected in many countries, the economic situation in some countries is such that the governments are unable to provide additional funding for expanding higher education.

iv) Private participation in expansion of higher education: In many countries of the GUNI-AP, expansion in higher education has been facilitated by private participation. While private participation in expanding higher education has been well recognized, the issue of quality and relevance of educational offerings of the private institutions has come under severe scrutiny in some countries. The national policy frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms have started to address this issue.

v) Emphasis on quality and relevance: In addition to national initiatives and policy formulations for expansion of higher education, some national mechanisms and policies for quality assurance in higher education could be found in most countries of the region. The region has realized the need for a separate quality assurance mechanism other than the traditional governmental control. The

quality assurance frameworks of the Asia-Pacific region, with respect to traditional operations of the traditional providers, are reasonably well developed. But the issue of quality assuring cross-border education warrants serious attention in most of the countries.

vi) International dimension of higher education: With many transition economies, the region has seen contradictory arguments about the international dimensions of higher education, in particular, about the trade in education services. Between enthusiastic views of the trade promoters at one end and the skeptical reflections of the academics of traditional outlook at the other, there are many different viewpoints in Asia and the Pacific and at least three major views deserve a mention. Firstly, there are those who support public policies that foster internationalisation in higher education and they defend cross-border education in all forms on academic, cultural, social and political grounds. Secondly, there are the academics, supporting the view that education should not be treated as a tradable commodity, who argue that cross-border education would always have a revenue generation approach that would be to the disadvantage of the developing countries. Thirdly, there are the trade enthusiasts who are convinced that commercialization of higher education at the global level is unavoidable in the near future and it is up to the countries to prepare themselves to benefit from the new opportunities of the global market.

It could also be noted that discussions of international trade in higher education in the region have become polarized according to whether a country is an exporter or an importer. Mechanisms for quality assuring cross-border operations are still in the initial stages of development. There is a realisation that the national quality assurance mechanisms that are oriented to the national context may not be able to deal with these issues effectively as they exist today. In many countries it is the ministries that have a regulatory role in cross-border educational services. Discussions are going on among the quality assurance agencies about cooperation for quality assurance of cross-border education.

Within these changing national frameworks, the HEIs vary a lot in the way they address quality-related issues at the institutional level.

Institutional Context and Responses

As all the case studies indicate, there is a high level of awareness in the higher education sector that societies are now organized around knowledge. The impact this has on HEIs is momentous and it could be observed in a number of ways in which the HEIs respond. The following merit a mention.

i) Internal quality assurance and institutionalization of quality assurance strategies: Freedom to HEIs to plan their development and to be responsible for their

planning and implementation could be observed as a common trend. In other words, a balance between autonomy and accountability is emerging. More freedom coupled with accountability concerns has made many HEIs initiate internal quality assurance mechanisms and institutionalize them.

ii) Quality consciousness in teaching as well as research: In general, one could observe that quality assurance measures have been introduced in the fields of teaching as well as research. There is awareness that top research universities have to be characterized by not only high quality research but also by high quality teaching.

iii) Internationalization and networking: Emphasis on internationalizing the curriculum and enhancing staff participation in international events could be seen. Formation of strategic alliances with universities outside the country, greater network of partnerships in academic activities such as joint research projects, joint publications, joint supervision, exchange of students (undergraduate and postgraduate), staff exchange, joint seminars and others could be observed.

iv) Research capacity development: A variety of new steps have been taken for strengthening research capacity. Excellence in research is seen as a necessary step to ensure a university's central role in a knowledge-based society. "Publish or perish" policy, leaning towards applied research, tendency to assess research performance by indicators, pooling of resources, a greater interdisciplinary approach to research and attention to efficient management of research have been observed, some of them causing concerns.

v) Revamping programme offerings: The introduction of new areas of studies and the revision of programme offerings could be noted. The concern that the "let the market decide" approach would adversely affect some specialties has been expressed. There is potential danger that this might lead to the so-called vocationalization of HEIs which could jeopardize the quality and promotion of traditional general education components in the system of higher education. The necessity to safeguard general education that emphasizes the development of the whole individual, and not just occupational training, has been expressed in the case studies.

vi) Policies on faculty quality: In general, the fact that quality teaching and research is made possible by the quality of faculty has been recognized well. Accordingly, qualification requirements for recruitment of staff, encouragement to faculty to update their qualifications, making higher qualifications essential for positions such as professorship, performance assessment and linking performance to

incentives are seen. Some of the exemplar practices deserve a more in-depth study for their impact.

vii) Institutional incentive policies: Incentive for good performance of staff and checks for non-performers have been highlighted in the case studies.

viii) Resource mobilization: As the HEIs are asked to look for their own funds, resource mobilization from alternate sources comes to the forefront of institutional strategies. Revenue generation approach by offering courses that are in demand is seen as a very promising alternative. Initiatives to increase the enrolment of foreign students, especially in the international programmes, establishing partnerships between the commercial sector and university research, and generating income through patenting and copyright in commercially viable research are some of the efforts taken by HEIs.

ix) Closer to industry? The case studies indicate that as HEIs move towards the self-sustaining mode, they lean towards partnering with industries. They are also aware of the dilemma that comes with this alliance. Will this change the relationship of the university with society and its public good perception? Can universities enter into closer relationships with market-oriented industries and still maintain their status as independent, autonomous institutions dedicated to the public good?

x) Future strategies on mutual recognition of qualifications: The HEIs have developed action plans and frameworks for future development. But they are all about overall strategies to enhance their academic reputation and mutual recognition of qualifications related issues do not find a place there. The desire to increase the mobility of students and their credentials is evident among the GUNI-AP members. But concrete practices to translate the desire into action could not be identified from the case studies. International accreditation is seen as a way of ensuring the acceptability of students and their qualifications across borders. Building on the potentials of the regional convention for recognition of qualifications and awareness about the mutual recognition issues seem to be low.

Recommendations for Next Steps

In all, the case studies have made a good beginning to present the challenges they face in their transition towards knowledge-based society. The case studies have also been useful to look at the good practices they follow, especially with reference to issues related to quality. But there are two issues that need attention – “differentiating value added practices from routines” and “translating the dialogue on cooperation into concrete implementation plans and pilot projects”.

Sometimes what the universities claim as good practices and quality assurance strategies border on the basic responsibilities they ought to discharge. “What is it that they do differently and with what results” has to be at the focus of discussions and case studies in future.

The objectives of the network are laudable and the effort to conduct trace studies contributes to the realisation of the objectives. However, to relate more directly to the objectives of the network such as to advice the policy makers on innovative practices, in-depth studies on select practices that have been proven to add commendable value to the quality of the HEIs, may be essential.

The intention for cooperation among the membership of the network is yet to be implemented into action. The regional convention for recognition of qualifications can find practical implementations, building on the strengths of this small network of top universities.

It is true that for realizing the objective of laboratory of ideas, this small, manageable and beautiful network is ideal. That should be exploited to the fullest to identify innovations that merit implementation. It should be noted that GUNI-AP is not just a platform for sharing ideas but it also has the potential to initiate concrete action plans. Viewed from this point of view, expanding the membership by bringing in a few more top universities of the member countries may be useful, especially to ensure critical mass for pilots on mutual recognition of qualifications.

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**APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSURANCE AND
MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS
(BASED ON SELECTED CASE STUDIES OF THE GUNI-AP MEMBERSHIP)**

**Section 1:
Background**

The largest of the UNESCO regions in terms of both area and population, the Asia-Pacific region is characterised by cultural, linguistic, social, political and economic diversities. With the exception of a few countries including the four OECD countries (Australia, Japan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea and New Zealand), the majority of the nations of the Asia-Pacific region are developing countries. The economies of many of these countries are growing rapidly; the national higher education systems in such countries are faced with the pressure of supporting the rapid economic developments. Some of the countries have introduced policy reforms and are restructuring higher education in a major way. As a result, the development stage of national higher education systems in the region is marked by a lot of diversities.

Amidst the diversity in terms of development stage, geographic coverage, the nature of the societies encompassed, prosperity levels, population sizes, and political frameworks, the higher education systems of the region do display certain commonalities. The extent of diversity makes the existence of commonality all the more remarkable. The commonalities include the way higher education institutions (HEIs) respond to changes in the context in which they operate such as responding to the impact of globalization.

Many countries of the Asia-Pacific region face significant new trends in the higher education systems due to the convergent impact of inter-related developments triggered by globalization. In 2003, the Follow-up Report to the World Conference on Higher Education of Asia and the Pacific noted that the Asia-Pacific region was going through a period of rapid and far-reaching economic and social change, driven particularly by the impact of accelerating globalization, increased international economic competition and the transition

from traditional to knowledge-based economies and often market-oriented systems. These changes continue to date and they provide higher education with many challenges, the major one being the move towards “knowledge-based or knowledge societies”.

Access to information and knowledge increasingly determines opportunities for development. Indeed, knowledge has become the principal force of social transformation and that is one of the reasons why the concept of “knowledge societies,” is gaining much attention. To build knowledge societies and benefit from them, HEIs have to respond in a variety of ways— this paper tries to capture the commonalities and diversities that are found among these responses in quality-related issues, based on select cases of the Asia-Pacific region. These cases were discussed under the auspices of the Global University Network for Innovation - Asia and the Pacific (GUNI-AP) in September 2004. To appreciate the analysis presented in this paper, the objectives of the GUNI-AP and the context in which these case studies were presented by the GUNI-AP members merit a mention.

Global University Network for Innovation - Asia and the Pacific (GUNI-AP)

The World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) held during 5-9 October 1998 in Paris has become a historical event in the UNESCO's history. One of the major resolutions adopted in its Declaration and Framework for priority for change and development for higher education was to call for the UNESCO to work jointly with the United Nations University (UNU) and with National Commissions and various intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and become a forum of reflection on higher education issues aiming at:

- (i) preparing update reports on the state of knowledge on higher education issues in all parts of the world;
- (ii) promoting innovative projects of training and research, intended to enhance the specific role of higher education in lifelong education;
- (iii) reinforcing international co-operation and emphasizing the role of higher education for citizenship education, sustainable development and peace; and

- (iv) facilitating exchange of information and establishing, when appropriate, a database on successful experiences and innovations that can be consulted by institutions confronted with problems in their reforms of higher education. More specifically, the Declaration of the World Conference on Higher Education requested the UNESCO and the UNU to launch a UNESCO/UNU supported Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI) to promote reform and innovation in higher education as an important follow-up activity.

With the signing of the agreement for the establishment of a UNESCO Chair in higher education between the UNESCO, the UNU and the Technical University of Catalonia (UPC), Barcelona, Spain in 1999 and with the consultation organized by the above-cited three parties in 2000-2001, the GUNI was officially established. The charter concerning the objectives, mechanisms, funding and working methodology of the GUNI was soon adopted. The GUNI has a secretariat based in the UPC. Following the launching of the GUNI, each region was asked by the UNESCO and the UNU to consider establishing a regional branch of the GUNI to promote reform and innovation in higher education in the region and work as a partner of the GUNI. As a response to this call, the Asia-Pacific regional network was formed.

Under the sponsorship of the UNESCO Asia and the Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok, a consultation meeting for launching the GUNI-AP was convened on 23 October 2001 in Hangzhou, China, involving the presidents of top universities from Australia, India, Indonesia, DPR Korea, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand. During the consultation, a steering committee to prepare the founding conference aiming at setting up of the GUNI-AP was established. A draft charter of the GUNI-AP was developed.

With guidance and financial support from the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok and the Chinese National Commission for UNESCO, the Global University Network for Innovation - Asia and the Pacific (GUNI-AP) was formally established with a Plan of Action adopted at its first General Assembly hosted by Zhejiang University, 20-22 September 2002, Hangzhou, China. Professor Pan Yunhe, President of Zhejiang University, was elected as the first President of the GUNI-AP. Professor Pornchai

Matangkasombut, President of Mahidol University, Thailand, was elected as Vice-President. Professor Ni Mingjiang, Vice-President of Zhejiang University, was appointed as Chief Executive of the GUNI-AP, who would be in charge of the work of the secretariat. An Action Plan was adopted for 2002-2004.

The composition of its ten founding members (La Trobe University, Australia; Zhejiang University, China; Devi Ahilya University, India; National University of Indonesia, Indonesia; Osaka University, Japan; Seoul National University, Republic of Korea; Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia; Chulalongkorn University, Thailand; Mahidol University, Thailand; United Nations University, Japan) provides a variety of scenarios and cases of reform and innovation in higher education going on in different countries with different economic, political, cultural, social and historical backgrounds. This variation indicates the potential, with the commitment made by the GUNI-AP founding members and its Plan of Action adopted for collaboration, to make the network a real laboratory of ideas and innovation in higher education in the region.

The GUNI-AP has specifically spelt out its objectives as below:

1. To organize trace and case studies of innovations in each member university in facing the challenges in transition towards an information and knowledge-based society;
2. To collect best practices of innovations from member universities in terms of governance, restructuring curricula, staff policy, linkage with the world of work, accreditation and quality assurance, dual and mixed mode, distance, open and e-learning, internationalization in globalization, etc.
3. To promote collaboration between member universities through exchange of staff, students and managers, joint programmes, trainings, meetings, publications and its website; and
4. To provide policy-makers and the UNESCO with fresh ideas, practices and recommendations regarding innovations in higher education.

In line with working towards the objectives envisaged above and as follow-up to realize decisions made at the GUNI-AP Founding Conference, an international symposium focusing on Quality Assurance and Mutual Recognition was organized during 20-21 September 2004 in Hangzhou, China. It was the first of

the series of activities in the Trace Study of the GUNI-AP on “Research Universities in Transition towards a Knowledge-Based Society”.

Research University in Transition towards a Knowledge-Based Society

The symposium focused on the way research universities had responded to Quality Assurance and Mutual Recognition in their transition towards a knowledge-based society. The symposium was expected to provide the platform for the exchange of experiences of innovative practices and future strategies on Quality Assurance in and Mutual Recognition of Qualifications between the GUNI-AP member universities. It was also expected to explore the priority areas and modality of activities for future collaboration between member universities and for making the GUNI-AP a laboratory of ideas and innovations in higher education.

The symposium was meant for the presidents, rectors and vice-chancellors and heads of research teams of the GUNI-AP member universities. Participants from non-member universities and other organizations were invited to register as observers. High-level officials and specialists from the UNESCO and the UNU were invited to deliver keynote speeches and serve as resource persons. The ten founding members from eight Asia-Pacific countries were invited to participate in the symposium. Each of the participating universities presented a paper on the innovative practices or reforms on quality assurance that have been introduced in their institutions in recent years. The presentations highlighted information in two parts. Part-I was about the overall strategy of the institution for its transition towards a knowledge-based society and Part-II was about the institutional response with specific reference to quality assurance and mutual recognition of qualifications.

As already mentioned, the ten founding members from various backgrounds have varied practices and have responded in different ways to the contextual demands. As a result the presentations made in the symposium highlight an interesting array of practices. The following three sections of this paper is an effort to identify a pattern among these varying practices that could form the base for discussing some of the issues of mutual recognition and academic mobility among the member countries. In particular, the next section (section 2) presents the changing scenario of knowledge-based societies and how these

changes affect HEIs. The third section explains the way the member universities of the GUNI-AP have responded to these changes. The final section identifies some approaches in these responses that can inform the next steps for the Asia-Pacific network.

Section 2: Impact of Knowledge-Based Society on Higher Education

In the context of globalization, higher education in its knowledge producing and disseminating function, is recognized as an essential driving force for national development in both developed and developing countries. The UNESCO Education Position Paper lists four key elements of globalization that need a mention:

- i) the growing importance of the knowledge society/economy
- ii) the development of new trade agreements which cover trade in education services
- iii) the innovations related to information and communication technologies (ICT) and
- iv) the emphasis on the role of the market and the market economy.

These key elements have been the catalysts for many new developments in higher education. Both opportunities and threats arise out of the convergent impact of these key elements. The *growing importance of knowledge as the driver of growth* entuses countries to promote higher education and lifelong learning. Realizing that enhancing individual capacity will ultimately build national intellectual capital, countries become more willing to invest in higher and further education. *Trade-related* developments bring efficiency and accountability to the forefront, among other things. The *ICT revolution* results in new forms of learning and new modes of educational delivery, supporting a country's drive to expand its system of education in exciting and flexible ways. A *market economy* induces traditional institutions to work towards remaining competitive and pushes institutions to innovate and be quality-oriented. *Globalisation* that cuts across all these developments acts as a catalyst and adds momentum to these inter-related developments.

There could be no second opinion on the fact that these are opportunities for the growth and development of any nation – developed or developing. However, if these opportunities are not used appropriately, which might happen more often in the case of developing and transition economies, those countries might be at risk. The risks are minimized in countries where the HEIs as centres of knowledge production and knowledge dissemination quickly respond and prepare themselves and the citizenry to benefit from the knowledge-based society.

The most notable responses are the ones that address the quality-related issues – ensuring and assuring to the stakeholders the quality of educational offerings. More and more HEIs find themselves in a position where the stakeholders demand value for money and declare that the quality of the provisions would have an impact on their decision-making. Students and parents prefer institutions known for quality. Governments and funding bodies support initiatives of institutions that have the potential to manage projects well. Employers prefer graduates from quality HEIs. With new modes of educational delivery that cross national borders, these quality-related issues also become transnational. The mobility of knowledge seekers and knowledge workers across national borders is on the increase and requires HEIs to demonstrate their commitment to offer quality programmes and qualifications offered in their name.

Consequently, HEIs implement strategies to gear up to meet stakeholder expectations, resulting in changes in institutional policies. Programmes to ensure the competitive edge of the educational provisions, as well as policies on staff recruitment, staff assessment and staff development undergo changes to support good teaching and research. HEIs take innovative measures for strengthening their teaching and research capacity and that requires investment in resources. Resource mobilization from alternative sources becomes a concern for many HEIs and more resources flow to HEIs that prove their quality. Implementing strategies that would ensure recognition elsewhere of the qualifications offered by HEIs and balancing intention for cooperation with healthy competition also influence institutional policies. Thus is formed a chain of responses and consequences that are intertwined and mostly centred around quality assurance and recognition-related issues.

Section 3:

Responses to Quality Assurance and Mutual Recognition

As the case studies reveal, the HEIs of Asia-Pacific are no exceptions to the consequences mentioned above and for a better understanding of the case studies, we need to look at the institutional responses in the background of the national context.

Changes in the National Context

In all the eight countries of the founding group, in the last two decades there have been significant changes at the national level. A major shift in national policies towards recognizing higher education as a priority could be observed in Asia and the Pacific. Although countries recognize higher education as a priority, it is not matched by an increase in funding. Reduced levels of funding, positive approach to private participation in expansion of higher education, emergence of a decentralized pattern of governance, emphasis on quality and relevance and debates on trade in education services could be observed in the countries.

i) Higher education as a priority

The Task Force on Higher Education and Society which was co-convened by the UNESCO and the World Bank in 1997 and whose report was issued in 2000, states that higher education “is to a knowledge economy as primary education is to an agrarian economy and secondary education is to an industrial economy”. Many countries of Asia and the Pacific have responded positively to this realization. Especially the period after 1998 indicates rapid and impressive growth in student enrolments and expansion in higher education provisions. In addition to specific strategies by the governments to increase student enrolment in higher education, many other factors such as higher output from secondary schools, greater participation of women in higher education, and a growing private sector demand for graduates seem to contribute to this trend.

For example, the case study from Thailand explains how the new constitution of Thailand in 1997, followed by a new Education Act two years later, has influenced a major change in the higher education system of Thailand. Compulsory education for the whole population has been raised from 9 to 12 years. Thus, a larger percentage of population has graduated from secondary

schools and has been moving towards higher education. The increasing rate of adult literacy (84.4% in 1997, 86.8% in 2001), together with the economic transformation from an agrarian to an industrial economy, have created a huge demand for further continuing education. The percentage of those who entered higher education increased from 59% in 1988 to 76% in 1998. Similar trends could be observed in other countries. In China, for instance, during 1998-2002, student enrolment in higher education almost doubled.

ii) Changes in pattern of governance

The emergence of a new paradigm in higher education management with emphasis on decentralization, allowing each unit to function more independently within an overall central authority, could be noted. Its implementation is found in the form of freedom for universities to plan and develop their educational programmes and to be responsible for them. It is a combination of autonomy and accountability that influences the mechanisms of quality assurance – internal and external – in various ways. For example, the Indonesian case study indicates that the implementation of the new paradigm in higher education management was based on five main pillars, namely: (1) sustainability in quality, (2) decentralizing authority and providing more autonomy, (3) accountability, (4) accreditation of quality by external evaluation, (5) data support in strengthening the decision-making process.

iii) Changing pattern of finance

While there has been a significant expansion of higher education provisions, the increased enrolment in HEIs in developing countries, most of which are publicly funded, has not been matched by a proportionate increase in public funding, and the HEIs, financially, now find themselves stretched almost to the limit. The hesitation of governments to fund higher education institutions was at one time influenced by the policy stand that higher education was a private good. Today, although this perception stands corrected in many countries, the economic situation in some countries is such that the governments are unable to provide additional funding for expanding higher education. In fact, a decrease in the funding levels from public sources seems to be the trend in some countries. Attention to sustainability of new schemes is also a common feature.

In India, for instance, fresh research funding is available for a limited period usually to initiate programmes in the national thrust areas. The idea is to ensure that institutions make efforts to initiate research with the seed funding and then make it viable after a period of time. The case study from India reveals that to adjust to the changes in funding patterns, the universities are now pressurized to make every programme economically viable, to direct research efforts towards areas likely to be of interest to industry, to initiate collaborative efforts in training and development programmes for the industry, and to attract foreign students into various popular programmes.

In many countries, in the absence of more public funding for expansion of higher education, private participation has been encouraged in a big way. This has also made HEIs look at business models to function as corporate entities, putting into practice such principles as quality management and efficiency and fiercely promoting revenue-generating activities.

iv) Private participation in expansion of higher education

In many countries of the GUNI-AP, expansion in higher education has been facilitated by private participation. In the early 2004, in Thailand, 56 out of 120 HEIs were private. During 1998-2003, the private colleges and universities in Malaysia increased from around 100 to 700. In India, most of the higher education institutions established after the 1980s are private ones and today private institutions outnumber public institutions in many states. Data on the number of HEIs in India indicate that in 2002, 78.20% of the colleges at the undergraduate level in engineering and technology, 76.20% of the colleges offering degree programmes in different branches of medicine and health sciences, 64.15% of the colleges offering programmes leading to a master's degree in management and 67.35% of the colleges for teacher education were in the private sector. While private participation in expanding higher education has been well recognized, the issue of quality and relevance of educational offerings of the private institutions has come under severe scrutiny in some countries. The national policy frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms have started to address this issue.

v) Emphasis on quality and relevance

In addition to national initiatives and policy formulations for expansion of higher education, some national mechanisms and policies for quality assurance in higher education could be found in most countries of the region. Among the GUNI-AP membership, in India, Japan, Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia and Korea, there are explicit quality assurance mechanisms with a greater role for the HEIs themselves. In China and Thailand, they are more at the governmental level and are centralized. They are also merged with other monitoring mechanisms that inform funding. When we observe the way quality assurance is evolving in the region, it is reasonable to say that the region has realized the need for a separate quality assurance mechanism other than the traditional governmental control.

Further, in most of the countries of the region, external quality assurance is of relatively recent origin. According to a survey done in 2004, in 15 countries in the region, there were about 20 major national quality assurance efforts operating by then, with about two-thirds of these initiatives having been established in the last decade. The quality assurance frameworks of the Asia-Pacific region, with respect to traditional operations of the traditional providers, are reasonably well developed. But the issue of quality assuring cross-border education warrants serious attention in most of the countries and it requires more deliberations.

vi) International dimension of higher education

With many transition economies, the region has seen contradictory arguments about the international dimensions of higher education, in particular, about the trade in education services. Between enthusiastic views of the trade promoters at one end and the skeptical reflections of the academics of traditional outlook at the other, there are many different viewpoints in Asia and the Pacific and at least three major views deserve a mention. Firstly, there are those who support public policies that foster internationalisation in higher education and they defend cross-border education in all forms on academic, cultural, social and political grounds. Secondly, there are the academics, supporting the view that education should not be treated as a tradable commodity, who argue that cross-border education would always have a revenue generation approach that would be to the disadvantage of the developing countries. Thirdly, there are the trade enthusiasts who are convinced that commercialization of higher education at the

global level is unavoidable in the near future and it is up to the countries to prepare themselves to benefit from the new opportunities of the global market.

It could also be noted that discussions of international trade in higher education in the region have become polarized according to whether a country is an exporter or an importer. Exporters of higher education to the region assert that it will increase the variety and amount of education services. Importers of the region are concerned that trade in education services will undermine the public education system and destroy intangible values with which higher education has been contributing to the establishment and development of a society.

Further, mechanisms for quality assuring cross-border operations are still in the initial stages of development. There is a realisation that the national quality assurance mechanisms that are oriented to the national context may not be able to deal with these issues effectively as they exist today. A recent survey conducted in 2004 among the membership of Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) indicates that only Australia, India, Malaysia and New Zealand have some mechanism in place to ensure the quality of the exports of their HEIs. For the import of educational services, there are mechanisms only in Australia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand and Philippines. But the extent to which the QAAs have a central role in these mechanisms is not very clear. In many countries it is the ministries that have a regulatory role in cross-border educational services. Discussions are going on among the quality assurance agencies about cooperation for quality assurance of cross-border education.

Within these changing national frameworks, the HEIs vary a lot in the way they address quality-related issues at the institutional level. What is happening among the GUNI-AP membership?

Institutional Context and Responses

i) Internal quality assurance and institutionalization of quality assurance strategies

From the case studies presented in the symposium, one could see that the GUNI-AP members have realized the importance of establishing internal mechanisms for quality assurance and the need to institutionalise them. In Indonesia, emphasis on internal quality assurance is meant to ensure that enhanced

freedom to the university to plan and develop its educational programmes is used in a responsible manner. The Chinese member, as one of the top research universities in China, has enjoyed more institutional autonomy than other HEIs of the country and the university claims that it is that autonomy that has made it possible for the university to take innovative measures for its internal quality assurance systems. In Malaysia, the internal mechanisms of the member university are driven by the need to ensure external recognition such as international accreditation in professional areas of studies and to uphold the international competitiveness of the other educational provisions.

The manifestations of the internal quality assurance mechanisms vary. Setting up of *ad hoc* internal teams (Internal Quality Assurance Cell of Indian universities) for improving quality of educational offerings, mostly by committees of senior staff of the institutions could be observed among the membership. A move towards formal structures and institutionalisation of the mechanisms (such as the establishment of the Board of Academic Audit in the University of Indonesia) with specific mandates to contribute to quality improvement could also be found. In UKM, the Centre for Academic Advancement is the agency responsible for carrying out activities pertaining to quality assurance issues – both internal as well as external. Whatever forms these efforts take up, the emphasis is on quality enhancement by internal mechanisms. To implement most of these strategies, since the institutions depend on internal committees of senior staff, the faculty reaction towards quality assurance seems to be positive.

ii) Quality consciousness in teaching as well as research

In general, one could observe that quality assurance measures have been introduced in the fields of teaching as well as research. There is awareness that top research universities have to be characterized by not only high quality research but also by high quality teaching. Introduction of innovative teaching methods, strengthening ICT in educational delivery, promoting team research, etc. have been attempted. In order to secure the quality of teaching at undergraduate level, the Chinese university set up a University Inspection Team for Teaching in 1999 with specific responsibilities such as providing suggestions for improvement to university authority. Arguments against the system that it might cause a disturbance of academic freedom and diversity of the mode of delivery in teaching could also be seen. The introduction of the tutor system for

undergraduate students provides the students with more opportunities to communicate with senior professors with regard to their current studies and future career planning.

iii) Internationalization and networking

Emphasis on internationalizing the curriculum, enhancing staff participation in international events and networking with institutions across national boundaries could be seen. The member institution from China encourages colleges to use original foreign textbooks and teaching materials as a way of strengthening the international competitiveness of its graduates. The case study of Malaysia highlights the way members of the faculty are encouraged to participate in international events. In UKM, the students are encouraged to learn foreign languages and partake in international activities.

An increase in the number of overseas students and an increase in competition in attracting overseas students have been recorded. In UKM, the number of foreign students in master's and doctoral programmes increased from 397 during 2001-2002 to 864 during 2004-2005. This is in addition to the 1% limit for foreign students in public universities set by the Ministry of Higher Education in undergraduate programmes. To increase the competitiveness of the university in attracting overseas students, the universities launch promotion activities in a number of countries.

Formation of strategic alliances with universities outside the country, greater network of partnerships in academic activities such as research, joint publications, joint supervision, exchange of students (undergraduate and postgraduate), staff exchange, joint seminars and others could be observed.

iv) Research capacity development

Research is the source for new knowledge ensuring the economic sustainability of a country. In this era of knowledge-based economies, the ability of a country to generate home-grown new knowledge and technology will help in sustainable growth. The case studies present a variety of new steps taken for strengthening research capacity. Excellence in research is seen as a necessary step to ensure a university's central role in a knowledge-based society. For example, the strategic plan of the University of Indonesia and the efforts of the Chinese member

emphasise developing the capacity for quality as well as quantity of their research outcomes. Efficient management of research has been duly noted as an area to be strengthened in some case studies. The case study of the Mahidol University records that universities aiming to emphasize their research abilities need to develop strong graduate programmes and efficient management. It argues that only through these two methods can quality and quantity of research be maintained, and these, in turn, can generate income for the university through grants and intellectual property rights.

The policies and strategies of the HEIs to strengthen research capacity indicate four features and some of them may cause concern:

- a. The “publish or perish” policy that gives universities a great increase in the quantity of research outcomes in terms of the number of papers and books published prevails. But the concern that quantity does not necessarily mean quality and that the growth of the quantity of research outcomes might be sometimes achieved at the expense of quality is well on the agenda among some members. Therefore, the gradual adjustment in institutional policies to balance the quantitative and qualitative approaches seems to be emerging.
- b. The policy to encourage applied research that is closely associated with national and local development is another area to be noted. This may affect the development of basic research and long-term research development.
- c. Assessing research performance by indicators such as research grants obtained by researchers is another feature. Wherever the grants come from external sources - government organizations, NGOs and local enterprises - the research grants themselves are seen as the best recognition of the research capacity of researchers. This feature combined with the leaning towards applied research gives a warning signal to the long-term research capacity development of HEIs. Having noted this, in China, the ZU is planning to increase financial inputs into some basic research areas and subjects that are relatively difficult to attract outside funds, to try to strike a proper balance between externally and internally funded research. To avoid the pitfalls of using a few indicators such as grants generated and number of papers published, the University of

Mahidol uses an integrated approach built around 10-15 indicators for its quality control of graduate programmes.

- d. Pooling of resources and a greater interdisciplinary approach to research have been reported by the members. Since a lot of teaching and research projects are being taken up on a joint execution basis, this helps in increased cooperation and healthy competition.

v) Revamping programme offerings

The introduction of new areas of studies and the revision of programme offerings could be noted. The Chinese university grants more university places for programmes with high employment rates and does not allow student enrolment in programmes in the following academic year for programmes that have poor employment rates. Almost all members have taken measures to revitalize traditional specialities by changing their focus to areas that are more closely associated with the emerging needs of an information and knowledge-based society.

The concern that the “let the market decide” approach would naturally shrink some specialties has been expressed. There is potential danger that this might lead to the so-called vocationalization of HEIs which could jeopardize the quality and promotion of traditional general education components in the system of higher education. The necessity to safeguard general education that emphasizes the development of the whole individual, and not just occupational training, has been expressed in the case studies.

vi) Policies on faculty quality

Changes in policies on staff recruitment and assessment of academic staff against a series of quantitative performance indicators in teaching and research can be observed. In China, this policy has turned out to be successful as the total number of research projects and outcomes recorded a dramatic increase. However, criticisms that this system could destroy the spirit of cooperation among the academic staff and force them to pursue personal gains deserve attention. The impact of faculty assessment against a set of quantitative indicators on staff who would engage in medium or long-term research also needs attention. Reduction in staff strength and recruitment of staff on contract basis for fixed periods are noted in the case study from India.

In general, the fact that quality teaching and research is made possible by the quality of faculty has been recognized well. Accordingly, qualification requirements for recruitment of staff, encouragement to faculty to update their qualifications, making higher qualifications essential for positions such as professorship, performance assessment and linking performance to incentives are seen. Some of the exemplar practices deserve a more in-depth study for their impact.

vii) Institutional incentive policies

Incentive for good performance of staff and checks for non-performers have been highlighted in the case studies. Special funds to subsidize the publication of textbooks compiled by university academicians and initiatives to identify and award best subjects among different disciplines to boost the quality of teaching of the university, followed in China, deserve a mention. The case study from China is the only report that presents a very elaborate picture about the various incentives the HEIs could think of. Teachers who engage in bilingual teaching and use English as the language of teaching are given special subsidies and financial assistance. For promotion to higher positions, performance assessment of teachers as reflected by student feedback, publications and research grants are considered. Performance-related subsidy is provided where once in two years the faculty members are assessed on a nine-point scale for differential subsidy. Improving the quality of working conditions, special terms of pay and conditions to attract first-class academicians, and short-term professorships to international leading academicians are a few other noticeable strategies found in the case study.

The report from India mentions the policy that facilitates faculty to generate resources through consultancy where up to 70% of the resources goes to the faculty. The case study of the University of Mahidol lists a variety of financial support for research assistants, post-doctoral fellows, paper publications, and participation in international conferences abroad. The university provides additional financial support to faculty members to do their research work abroad for a short period of time, and to discuss cooperation with foreign universities. These are practices that have been reported to contribute to the capacity development of the GUNI-AP members in research.

viii) Resource mobilization

As the HEIs are asked to look for their own funds, resource mobilization from alternate sources comes to the forefront of institutional strategies. For example, in Malaysia, all public universities have been given the target of achieving 25% self-sustenance by the year 2010. The UKM has responded to this target by tapping the enormous commercial potential of its human resource expertise. Its strategy involves harnessing the expertise of the UKM to provide specialist consultancy, using its research and technology transfer capabilities, offering executive and specialist training programmes for the community and industry, etc. To this end, UKM Holdings Sdn Bhd. has been incorporated under the Companies Act, 1965, with an authorised capital of RM 3 million on April 19, 2000. The company is the commercial wing of the UKM, responsible for planning and drawing up of general policies with regard to business activities conducted using UKM-owned sources.

Although the other case studies do not show evidence of a strong revenue generation approach of this nature, setting up of international programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels is seen as a very promising alternative. Initiatives to increase the number of foreign students, especially in the international programmes, establishing partnerships between the commercial sector and university research, and generating income through patenting and copyright in commercially viable research are some of the efforts taken by HEIs.

ix) Closer to industry?

The case studies indicate that as HEIs move towards the self-sustaining mode, they lean towards partnering with industries. They are also aware of the dilemma that comes with this alliance. Will this change the relationship of the university with society and its public good perception? Can universities enter into closer relationships with market-oriented industries and still maintain their status as independent, autonomous institutions dedicated to the public good? The answer could be in the affirmative if universities engage society in research development more closely and contribute to socially robust knowledge. The GUNI-AP members seem to be aware of this issue.

x) Future strategies on mutual recognition of qualifications

There is awareness that in this time of uncertainty and competition, in order to thrive, every institution needs to develop a strategy. By defining its niche, each institution seems to make an honest assessment of what type of research it should pursue and how. The HEIs have developed action plans and frameworks for future development. But they are all about overall strategies and issues related to mutual recognition of qualifications do not find a place there.

The UKM Strategic Plan lists 10 strategies and each strategy is supported by a list of activities and the internal implementers who are responsible for these activities. Each activity supporting the objective is placed in a particular time frame, short-term (2000-2005), intermediate (2006-2010) and long-term (2011-2020). Performance indicators measure the success of each activity and the Centre for Academic Advancement monitors the implementation of the strategies. On quality assurance and mutual recognition, the future strategies mention of (a) initiation of quality consciousness b) cooperation and information sharing with comparable institutions in the country and abroad.

In China, it is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MoE) to sign agreements of mutual recognition of qualifications with foreign countries and the MoE of China has signed such agreements with 18 countries. At the university level, mutual recognition of qualifications means the university could introduce joint programmes with foreign providers. The university is also seeking to establish agreements on mutual recognition of credits with international leading universities as a way of strengthening students exchange programmes between universities.

The desire to increase the mobility of students and their credentials is evident among the GUNI-AP members. But there are not many concrete practices that can be identified from the case studies. International accreditation is seen as a way of ensuring the acceptability of students and their qualifications across borders. For example, the UKM has gone for international accreditation of its professional programmes in chemical engineering, biomedical sciences and accountancy. But efforts towards mutual recognition agreements seem to be absent.

Future strategies for promoting mutual recognition of qualifications is a weak area for most of the members. Institutions are yet to find appropriate ways of ensuring wider recognition of the qualifications they offer. Probably this is an area where a lot of capacity development effort has to be initiated. Most of the case studies are silent about this aspect and tend to look at this section as a sort of conclusion to the case study. It is very unfortunate to note that HEIs are not aware of the potential of the Regional Convention for recognition of degrees, diplomas and awards in the Asia-Pacific. HEIs tend to follow the case-by-case approach as has been the practice. Promoting awareness about the rights and responsibilities of individuals and HEIs in countries that are signatories to the regional convention may be useful.

Section 4:

Emerging Pattern of Responses and Next Steps

As all the case studies indicate, there is a high level of awareness in the higher education sector that societies are now organized around knowledge, having evolved from an industrial development mode into a communications development mode. The immediate consequence of such an evolution is that the creation of new knowledge products, capacity for innovation and commitment to quality become central to any thriving institution of higher education. The impact this has on HEIs is momentous and it could be observed in a number of ways in which the HEIs respond.

Emerging Pattern of Responses

The commonalities and diversities in responses should be seen against the limited number of case studies that were discussed in the GUNI-AP forum. Although the GUNI-AP members come from different backgrounds that have enriched the discussions, the size of the network is a limiting factor to draw broad generalisations. But for the purposes of identifying a variety of responses that address quality related issues and to look for a pattern among HEIs of similar characteristics the approaches discussed in section 3 would be useful.

The case studies reveal that some of the institutional responses are about internal re-organisation for effective functioning in the changing context. Internal quality assurance mechanisms and institutionalising a variety of strategies to ensure quality come under this category.

Some other responses indicate re-interpretation of the mandated responsibilities and objectives of HEIs. Ensuring quality of teaching, recruiting quality faculty, strengthening student support services and paying attention to curriculum updating are a few that come under this category. In fact these are the core activities for which HEIs are established and the emergence of the knowledge based societies pushes the HEIs to re-interpret them. Consequently, the HEIs bring in changes in their policies and processes to discharge these responsibilities in a more meaningful manner.

Capacity building in teaching as well as research to meet the challenges of the changing context could be observed. Practices that attempt to ensure the central role of HEIs in the knowledge-based society, incentives for good practices, supporting faculty development, efforts to uphold the competitive edge in attracting good human resource demonstrate this trend.

New models of management seem to emerge. Reaching out, partnership strategies across national boundaries and pooling of resources could be seen. Revenue generation approach in dealing with international students and business models for resource generation could be noticed. A combination of cooperation and competition seems to be the key word.

Awareness of the adverse effects of some of these changes is very much on the agenda of faculty discussions. Concerns about some of the approaches such as “Publish or perish” policy, leaning towards applied research, tendency to assess performance by quantitative indicators, “let the market decide” approach in curricular reforms, vocationalisation of higher education, implications of business models on public goods perception, eroding academic autonomy of faculty etc have been made explicit. The impact of these approaches on the quality of HEIs in the mid-term and long-term deserves attention.

With specific reference to mutual recognition, the HEIs do not seem to have any action plans and a case by case approach is followed. The desire to increase the mobility of students and their credentials is evident among the GUNI-AP members. But concrete practices to translate the desire into action could not be identified from the case studies. International accreditation is seen as a way of

ensuring the acceptability of students and their qualifications across borders. Building on the potentials of the regional convention of qualifications and awareness about the mutual recognition issues seem to be low.

Recommendations for Next Steps

In all, the case studies have made a good beginning to present the challenges the HEIs face in their transition towards knowledge-based society. The case studies have also been useful to look at the good practices they follow. But there are two issues that need attention – “differentiating value added practices from routines” and “translating the dialogue on cooperation into concrete implementation plans and pilot projects”.

Sometimes what the universities claim as good practices and quality assurance strategies border on the basic responsibilities they ought to discharge. “What is it that they do differently and with what results” has to be at the focus of discussions and case studies in future.

The objectives of the network are laudable and the effort to conduct trace studies contributes to the realisation of the objectives. However, to relate more directly to the objectives of the network such as to advice the policy makers on innovative practices, in-depth studies on select practices that have been proven to add commendable value to the quality of HEIs, may be essential.

The intention for cooperation among the membership of the network is yet to be implemented into action. The regional convention for recognition of qualifications can find practical implementations, building on the strengths of this small network of top universities.

It is true that for realizing the objective of laboratory of ideas, this small, manageable and beautiful network is ideal. That should be exploited to the fullest to identify innovations that merit implementation. It should be noted that GUNI-AP is not just a platform for sharing ideas but it also has the potential to initiate concrete action plans. Viewed from this point of view, expanding the membership by bringing in a few more top universities of the member countries may be useful, especially to ensure critical mass for pilots on mutual recognition of qualifications.

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