

WG 1 Benchmarking and Development of QA standards

Working Group 1 entailed two presentations:

One by Professor Damrong from Thailand and also member of AUN-QA and the ASEAN University Network.

And one presentation by Birgit Hanny and Christoph Heumann from the German accreditation organisation in engineering ASIIN. They presented in their function as project coordinators of the EUR-ACE and Euro-Info Projects.

Presentation by Prof Damrong

Prof Damrong started with explaining the system from internal quality assurance CU-QA 84 which was developed for an university in Thailand. In Thailand it is voluntary for each university to develop their own internal quality assurance system. The CU-QA 84 is comprehensive in the sense that it covers input, processes, output and the stakeholders in quality assurance. There are three phases in this system:

Phase 1 is about the development and awareness of quality assurance systems.

Phase 2 includes internal benchmarking, and best practices in the university. It also entails quality awards within the university.

Phase 3 deals with external benchmarking. Comparisons are made with other universities; these may be in another country.

Linked to the benchmarking are different levels of evaluation: evaluating whether the PDCA (plan-do-check-act) cycle is functioning; evaluation for national, regional (ASEAN) and international purposes.

Prof Damrong then told us about the AUN-QA activities within ASEAN. AUN comprises 17 member universities in 10 ASEAN countries. AUN-QA has developed as a series of workshops where common criteria and guidelines, benchmarking, assessment processes, and other topics are being discussed. Now the focus for future workshops is on harmonisation. Another topic of the workshops is a AUN-QA label for AUN members who would like to have this label. In addition, the label could also be made available for non-members.

Prof Damrong has also done research in comparing different quality assurance models, such as EFQM and MBNQA, and developing a model suitable for universities in Thailand.

Presentation by Birgit Hanny and Christoph Heumann (ASIIN)

This presentation by ASIIN dealt with projects and networks in the field of engineering.

Three projects were presented:

- 1) The European Network for Accreditation in Engineering Accreditation (ENAE)
- 2) The European Chemistry Thematic Network Association (ECTNA)
- 3) Euro Info in the field of computer science and informatics.

The purposes and approaches of these three networks vary but there are some commonalities:

All three of these projects are about developing specific standards in a certain discipline (i.e. engineering, chemistry, computer sciences). These projects are also exploring the possibilities for a European Quality Label (with initial funding from the European Commission) in their disciplines. They focus on the bachelor and master level; in chemistry the master level initiative is still in the development phase.

These projects have also in common that they would like to promote accreditation and accreditation standards in systems where these do not exist yet.

The networks have different compositions but accreditation organisations, institutions and professional bodies are somehow involved.

The presenters from ASIIN concluded that these projects are very beneficial in that they increase mutual knowledge of respective national approaches; shared definitions and a basic vocabulary; shared ideas on what quality would mean; and help to formulate subject related standards. They also concluded that it is important to involve national accreditation organisations in these initiatives.

Responding to a question on its role it became clear that ASIIN is acting as an accreditation organisation in their own national context; as coordinator of the projects; and as an agent for these networks in Germany.

Discussion

With these two presentations by Prof Damrong and ASIIN we have seen two different approaches in two different regions. The former is focused on internal quality assurance, the latter on external quality assurance. Despite these differences one can also see commonalities:

- Both provide standards and guidelines
- The networks have developed these standards and guidelines themselves
- Participation is voluntary and institutions are involved.

In spite of these common characteristics there was the question whether more could be done to harmonise such initiatives which are now taking place with different approaches and in different regions. As it became clear from the discussion, harmonisation is difficult. A comment was made that it might take one lifetime to harmonise internal and external quality assurance, and another lifetime for different regions to harmonise. Of course one could also argue that more conferences on regionalisation and quality assurance could shorten this time span.