

UNESCO-APQN Toolkit

Regulating Quality Assurance in Cross-Border Education May 2007

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Introduction

Toolkit aims to assist the development of regulatory frameworks for quality assurance in cross-border education.

- Importer Countries
- Exporter Countries



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Audience for the Toolkit

- Policy makers and government
- Quality assurance and accreditation agencies
- Higher education institutions
- Credential evaluation and recognition bodies
- Student bodies
- Regional and international organisations
- Academic and academic associations

UNESCO/OECD Guidelines

Guidelines recommend governments establish or encourage the establishment of:

- A comprehensive system of fair and transparent registration, or licensure in the receiving country of all cross-border higher education provision
- Capacity for reliable quality assurance and accreditation of higher education provider not only in the country but also across borders.



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Issues to reflect on

- To what extent does your country's arrangements for quality assuring cross-border education align with the Guidelines?
- What are the areas addressed in the Guidelines that you could look to improving?
- How well-known and understood are the Guidelines in your country?
- What steps could you take to help increase awareness?



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Cross-border Education

Cross-border education is the delivery in one country of education that directly originates in whole or in part, from another country.

- Exporter country is the source country of the programme, qualification etc
- Importer country is the host country in which the programme is delivered.



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What Does Cross-border Education Occur?

Demand Side

- Attraction of overseas qualification
- Insufficient supply of education
- Lower cost than studying overseas
- More flexible mode of study
- Greater variety – more flexible structures of programmes

Supply Side

- Development of technology improved remote delivery
- Pressure on institutions to generate additional income
- Change in academic and organisational culture
- Desire to pilot new programmes in a foreign market
- Desire of staff for self advancement



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Types of Cross-border Education

- Setting up branch campus
- Collaboration with a local partner
 - Exporting institution controls
 - Shared programme delivery
 - Programme delivery delegated to local partner
- Validation by an overseas awarding institution of a programme
- Pure distance learning mode of delivery



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Cross-border education can encompass

- programmes and qualifications that are externally quality assured by the quality assurance body in the exporting country
- programmes and qualifications with an exporter country branding that are internally approved/accredited by the exporting institution
- programmes leading to professional qualifications/international qualifications (eg IELTS)
- programmes and qualifications from the country the service is delivered in (but with heavy exporter country input into development and/or delivery)
- a mix of the above, including jointly-awarded qualifications

Problems with Quality

Macro-level Factors

- Inadequacy of quality assurance systems at the national level
- Inadequacy of information sources

Institutional Level Factors

- Insufficient understanding of cross-border education
- Inadequacy of institutional quality assurance mechanisms
- Insufficient understanding of local education systems
- Difficulty in obtaining local resources
- Over-reliance upon inexperienced local partners
- Inadequate inter-institutional agreements in place
- Inadequate management and governance structures



Quality Issues and Implications

- Programme Quality
 - Lower standard of programme
 - Lower entry and exit requirements
 - Poor or inadequate teaching resources
 - Undesirable teaching techniques
 - Mode of delivery is poorly monitored
- Misleading or dishonest information
- Financial Issues

Issues to reflect on

- What are the different forms that cross-border education is taking, and what are the implications of these for quality assurance?
- How is cross-border education changing? What are the implications of this for quality assurance – in particular for regulatory approaches to quality assurance?
- What are the key risks to quality in cross-border education? To what extent are these different to the issues of domestic quality assurance?
- What are the special factors behind quality issues in cross-border education?
- What is the right balance of responsibility for quality between exporting and importing countries – how can this balance best be established and managed?



Regulatory Frameworks: Importing Countries

Functions of a Regulatory Framework

- enabling government to regulate and safeguard the quality of cross-border education and its impact on domestic education outcomes
- enabling government to regulate the supply of education
- enabling government to regulate cross-border provision in accordance with national policies
- enabling the government to collect information on the market and on the operation of cross-border education
- helping government to provide information to students and other stakeholders



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Types of Regulatory Frameworks

- Tighter control versus looser control
- Self-approval and accreditation versus external approval and accreditation
- Enforced regulation (mandatory) versus Incentive system (voluntary)
- Single system for both domestic and cross-border or dual system



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Factors Influencing Choice and Design of Systems

- Prevalent policy and public opinion
- Development and scale of the market
- Existence of a domestic regulatory system
- Nature of cross-border education
- Resource considerations

Setting Up a Regulatory Framework

- Issues to consider in defining the scope of regulation
 - the level of programme to be regulated
 - the type of programme to be regulated
 - the modes of delivery to be regulated
 - the scope of programme to be regulated
 - the type of educational activities to be regulated



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Setting Up a Regulatory Framework (2)

- Issues to consider – criteria of regulation
 - Status/recognition of the programmes/qualifications in the home country
 - Academic quality
 - Consumer protection
 - The needs or national policies of the country
- Criteria that relate to status/recognition of the programme in home country



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Setting Up a Regulatory Framework (3)

- Criteria that relate to academic quality
 - General academic criteria
 - Dual systems
 - Specific academic requirements
- Criteria that relate to consumer protection
- Criteria that relate to the needs and national policies of the country



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Setting Up a Regulatory Framework (4)

- Other issues to consider:
 - The type of framework – regulation and/or legislation
 - The nature of the framework
 - Choice of implementing organisations
 - Government organisation/department
 - Independent organisation outside of government
 - Use of more than one organisation each with separate responsibilities
 - Funding the regulatory framework



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Preparation and Implementation

- Preparation
 - Background research, analysis and consultation
 - Investigation into regulatory models and design of a regulatory system
 - Preparation for implementation
 - Publicity and promotion of the system
- Implementation
 - Starting implementation
 - Establishing the evidence for compliance

Enforcement

- Co-operating with exporter countries
- Possible problems during implementation
- Interpretation of laws and regulations
- Resistance from providers and others
- Pressure of workload and unpredictability
- Difficulties in promoting public awareness
- Issue of recognition of qualifications



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Issues to reflect on

- Why might an importer country want to regulate cross-border education quality assurance?
- What are the options available for developing a regulatory framework? What is an appropriate balance between tight control/looser control, mandatory/voluntary approaches etc? Should this balance vary according to sector or by some other criteria?
- Which approach best describes your country at present? what approaches could be used in future development?
- Where change might be needed what are the factors to consider in developing and implementing improvements?
- What are the problems you might encounter and obstacles you might face in developing and implementing a framework/improving an existing framework?
- How best to develop links with, and work with, exporter countries' quality assurance agencies?



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Regulatory Frameworks – Exporter Countries

Issues exporter countries might consider

- Reputation of their education system, qualifications system and individual programmes and qualification
- Relationship with domestic education
- Desire to ensure that its nationals, institutions and companies are delivering quality service overseas
- Importer countries may require some form of external quality assurance or Government endorsement before accepting initiatives
- General international reputation



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Approaches to Regulation

- Quality assurance of cross-border education is still a relatively new field and new ideas and approaches are still evolving
- Often development has been reactive in response to problems arising
- Development has sometimes been ad-hoc and the domestic frameworks and legislation from which any system has developed are not necessarily well-tuned for cross-border education quality assurance



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Quality Assurance Approaches

- Use of five year audit cycle (sometimes with shorter audit periods for new providers or providers with specific risks identified)
- Use of a four stage model for quality assessment by an independent agency: self assessment, peer review, site visit and a public report
- Trend towards the external evaluation of quality assurance agencies
- Use of regional frameworks to improve cooperation and understanding



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Defining the Scope of Regulation

Breadth of Coverage

- No coverage offshore
 - No external quality assured programmes offered offshore
 - Externally quality assured qualifications offered off shore but no additional external quality assurance
- Cover only programmes that are already externally quality assured
- Quality assure all offshore programmes and qualifications offered by a registered or statutorily constituted education provider
- Quality assure all programmes and qualifications offered offshore by any exporter country organisation



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Defining the Scope of Regulation

Depth of Coverage

- Limited Approach – quality assurance agency limits itself to approval of programmes modified for offshore delivery
- Thorough quality assurance of exporting organisation
- Full quality assurance of exporting organisation and any overseas partners



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Criteria for Accreditation

- Covered by the provider's quality management system
- Consistent with the standards of the providers domestic operations
- Likely to be viable and sustainable
- Tailored to be appropriate to the local requirements and context
- Compliant with legal requirements in the importer country and meet any applicable quality assurance requirements there
- Acceptable to the relevant educational authorities in the particular country



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Criteria for Accreditation – with Overseas Partner

- Evidence of good standing and track record of the overseas partner institution and evidence that meets appropriate quality assurance requirements in the importer country
- Clear written agreement between the parties detailing expectations and obligations
- Details of the quality assurance processes applying to the overseas partner.

Additional Issues to Consider

- Jurisdiction
- Non-academic areas – pastoral care and fee protection
- Preparation, implementation and enforcement
 - Examine other overseas examples
 - Involve stakeholders
 - Reliance on sanctions applicable within the exporter country



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Potential Problems

- Utility of existing structures and legal framework for cross-border purposes
- Providers may attempt to structure delivery models to evade jurisdiction
- There may be a conflict between the requirements of importing and exporting countries
- Ensuring the responsible quality assurance bodies have good systems in place for cross-border quality assurance and suitably skilled and experienced staff



Issues to reflect on

- Why might an exporting country want to regulate cross-border education quality assurance?
- What are the options available for developing a regulatory framework? What is an appropriate balance between tight control/looser control, mandatory/voluntary approaches etc? Should this balance vary according to sector or by some other criteria?
- How best to manage the issues of quality assuring operations in another national jurisdiction?
- How best to approach associated areas outside core academic quality assurance – eg pastoral care issues?
- What are the problems you might encounter and obstacles you might face in developing and implementing a framework/improving an existing framework?
- How best to develop links with, and work with, importer countries' quality assurance agencies?



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For Further Information

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