Quality Assurance in Higher Education

A Practical Handbook

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*The **Yehuda Elkana Center for Higher Education** (https://elkanacenter.ceu.edu) at Central European University is a collaborative academic initiative promoting applied policy research and professional development in higher education. The Center builds on more than two decades of experience at CEU in promoting policy research in higher education, as well as policy advising and professional development programs for governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and higher education institutions from countries on all continents. The Center places a particular focus on applied studies regarding the relationship between higher education policies and practices and issues of democratic development. Applied research projects are carried out by CEU faculty members, researchers, and graduate students, in cooperation with higher education experts from other universities and organizations worldwide. The Center also builds on the long history of cooperation between CEU and the Higher Education Support Program of the Open Society Foundations.*

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INTRODUCTION

Myanmar continues to advance on the path of a major political, economic, and social transformation. In the age of knowledge societies, it also needs to modernize and develop its national higher education system. In order for this process to be effective, it must build on the country's traditions, and address specific needs and local defining characteristics. At the same time, the modernization and development process can be supported by making use of positive experiences from other countries, and also by avoiding some of the mistakes that have been made elsewhere during similar transition periods.

Together with other key areas - such as university autonomy - quality of higher education is one of the most important and pressing issues for the development of a national higher education system. The quality of higher education activities and outcomes will have a significant impact on the Myanmar economy and on other sectors, such as public health, public administration, or democratic citizenship. The quality of university graduates, and of the work of universities as a whole, will also influence Myanmar's capacity for strengthening its regional cooperation within ASEAN, and international cooperation more generally. For these reasons, quality of higher education is a priority area for both higher education institutions and the policy makers.

Challenges with regard to quality in higher education exist everywhere, they are not unique to Myanmar. This topic has been placed on the higher education policy agendas and actively and continuously addressed in nearly all parts of the world for at least the last three decades, if not longer in some parts of the world. For example, in the United States, the process of voluntary accreditation, as an endeavor to ensure and certify quality, dates back to the 1900s. In Europe, the first major discussions and reforms related to assuring quality of higher education took place around 1980s, mainly in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, while a bigger, revolutionary wave of changes followed across the other European countries in the 2000s, in relation to the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In the Southeast Asian region, the late 1990s marked the foundation of the ASEAN University Network – Quality Assurance (AUN-QA), while in 2008 the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network was established (SEAMEO RIHED, 2012). To sum up, already in 2010 it was stated that "there were very few countries in the world that were not developing national programs for quality assurance in higher education" (Liz Reisberg, Lecture on Quality Assurance on April 8-20 2010 UNICAMP training in Brazil)[1].

This considerably long period of efforts and developments in the area of quality assurance in higher education provides an opportunity to look back across

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[1]Full presentation "Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Defining, Measuring, Improving It" by Liz Reisberg is available at: http://www.gr.unicamp.br/ceav/content/eventos_lreisberg.php. Accessed online on October 15, 2016.

countries and regions and try to analyze which approaches and practices have worked, and which have failed. Most importantly, based on the existing studies and analyses, one can try to assess whether the existing quality processes and systems have actually led to quality improvement in higher education. If the answer is yes, one should look closer at how it has been achieved. If the answer is not so positive, one should also try to learn from the less successful cases and try to avoid similar mistakes. For Myanmar, this is an opportunity to analyze which experiences might be more relevant for country its own needs and challenges.

This Handbook is not meant as a manual for quality assurance specialists. Rather, it aims to provide a practical introduction to broader but crucial considerations and questions, and help facilitate a national debate on the topic of higher education quality and quality assurance in Myanmar. The Handbook introduces and discusses a number of key concepts, supplemented by examples of practices and methods from different higher education systems across the world. The examples presented, mainly from Europe, but also from Asia and North America, aim to illustrate the diversity that exists, across higher education systems, in the ways of addressing the issue of quality in higher education, and facilitate the policy planning and decision making in Myanmar, in particular by helping to identify which questions to address in priority and what measures to adopt and begin to introduce incrementally.

The emphasis on cases from Europe can be explained by two main factors, which are relevant for Myanmar. On the one hand, in Europe – same as in Myanmar, but unlike in the U.S., Canada, or Australia - the state plays a decisive role in higher education, from being the main source of funding to the adoption and enforcement of regulations, including with regard to quality. This factor makes the European experiences more relevant for Myanmar than the ones from the U.S., for example, where the state has only a reduced role in quality assurance. On the other hand, Europe currently has a developed and sophisticated quality assurance environment, which combines regional (European) and national frameworks, standards, principles and institutions. Many European countries, and in particular those undertaking post-communist transition, have successfully developed their quality assurance systems from scratch while taking part in the project of building the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). A similar, although not identical, process is currently being attempted in the ASEAN region, and the European experience might again prove useful for Myanmar.

This is the second Practical Handbook on higher education issues developed by the Yehuda Elkana Center for Higher Education at Central European University for colleagues and partners in Myanmar. The first Handbook was prepared in 2014 and dealt with the topic of university autonomy and its dimensions. The Practical Handbook on University Autonomy can be accessed freely on the Center's page at: https://elkanacenter.ceu.edu/publications.

Central European University and Open Society Foundations

Since 2012, the Open Society Foundations (OSF) have been active in Myanmar, ready to assist with and collaborate on capacity building and development efforts, including in the area of higher education. Central European University (CEU), a long-time partner institution of the OSF, has been actively involved and committed to higher education collaborative projects in Myanmar since 2013. Since 1991, after the collapse of the communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe, CEU has built expertise in working with other universities, national authorities, non-governmental and intergovernmental international organizations to promote reforms of higher education that serve students in those countries and other key stakeholders, their national economies and democratic developments. This expertise encompasses at present not only Central and Eastern Europe, but also Europe as a whole, Central and South East Asia, the Middle East, and also Africa and South America. The main unit at CEU organizing this work is the Yehuda Elkana Center for Higher Education. In addition to its own staff, the Elkana Center has built an extensive network of outstanding international experts for a range of higher education topics.[2]

CEU faculty from the departments of legal studies, international relations, political science, and the School of Public Policy have actively collaborated with Yangon and Mandalay Universities since 2013. This included the organization of capacity building and curriculum development workshops in Myanmar. In addition, CEU regularly hosts academic staff from Myanmar universities who spend several months on its campus in Budapest as visiting fellows to conduct research, develop new or refresh existing curricula, and acquaint themselves with how CEU, as an English-speaking, international, student-centered and research-intensive university dedicated to the promotion of open society and democracy, operates on a daily basis[3]. Since December 2016, CEU PhD candidates and recent doctoral graduates have an opportunity to become CEU Global Teaching Fellows at one of the partner universities in Myanmar, teaching regular courses for a semester or a full year.[4]

CEU also endeavors to contribute to the reforms in the area of higher education policy and management in Myanmar. Since 2013, CEU higher education experts have been working with colleagues in Myanmar on key topics such as university autonomy, university charters, university governance and management, higher education system development, and now also quality and quality assurance and enhancement. The aim of these activities is to share information and experiences regarding some of the most pressing issues in higher education today and approaches to addressing them, in order to support the reform efforts as part of

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[2]Extended information about CEU is presented https://www.ceu.edu/. To learn more about the CEU Elkana Center for Higher Education, please visit: https://elkanacenter.ceu.edu/
[3]Learn more about fellowship opportunities at CEU: https://www.ceu.edu/research/opportunities
[4]Learn more about the CEU Global Teaching Fellowship scheme: https://acro.ceu.edu/global-teaching-fellowship-program-2

the overall transformation of the country. This includes stimulating a broader debate about the role of higher education in the transition process, possible directions of development, as well as providing international comparative information to inform homegrown decision making at the national level and in universities. This Handbook, along with a series of events related to the topic of higher education quality organized by CEU in collaboration with other partners, represent yet another expression of these joint efforts in the area of higher education policy and management.

The Handbook – purpose, methodology and structure

The immediate purpose of this Handbook is to provide an overview of the key concepts in quality and quality assurance in higher education, of their understanding and related questions and trends. It has been written based on an analysis of the relevant higher education literature, in particular several comprehensive studies on the topic of quality assurance. The main resources for this Handbook include comparative work conducted by international agencies such as OECD – a 2008 volume by Santiago et al.; UNESCO – the 2007 report on "External quality assurance in higher education: making choices" (Martin and Stella); European organizations such as the European University Association (EUA), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), the European Association for International Education (EAIE); and a comprehensive report from 2012 by the Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO RIHED) analyzing higher education quality assurance systems in the ASEAN countries. In addition, the Handbook presents country and institutional case studies and examples of practices in the area of quality assurance and enhancement. Another very useful resource that could help guide the discussions about developing a quality assurance framework in Myanmar is the training material developed by the UNESCO's Institute for International Educational Planning (IIEP), specifically a series of training modules, 1-5: "External quality assurance: options for higher education managers" (2006).[5]

The Handbook is divided into four sections. The first section introduces the main concepts and questions relevant for the area of quality in higher education, with the aim to provide a basis for a broader discussion. The following section looks at quality as seen from a system perspective - known as external quality assurance. In this section, various models and practices for assuring quality are discussed. The third section briefly focuses on the area of internal quality assurance and ways by which higher education institutions work in practice to ensure and enhance quality. The fourth chapter attempts to summarize the issues that might be particularly relevant for Myanmar at this time or in the near future.

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[5]Full training modules on Quality Assurance are available online at the UNESCO-IIEP resource library page: http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001824/182478e.pdf

PART 1. QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION. BASIC CONCEPTS & QUESTIONS.

The objective of this chapter is to present the basic concepts and questions about quality in higher education that could help inform the discussions and deliberations in Myanmar. The selected topics represent some of the most common themes and questions related to quality that are present in the higher education debates and in the literature. The chapter does not attempt to be a full compendium. It is structured around ten simple but important questions about quality and quality assurance in higher education.

Question 1. Why quality and quality assurance are important for Myanmar?

Before addressing these specific questions, one broader issue that might be helpful to clarify is why quality in higher education and quality assurance are important for Myanmar during the current period of transformations in the country. As already discussed in the Practical Handbook on University Autonomy (Matei, Iwinska, 2014), universities and higher education in general need and can play important roles in the overall transformation of the country. More precisely:

- Universities can and must make a contribution to the economic development of the country.
- Universities can contribute to the democratic transition in Myanmar. They can make a contribution to the renewal of the politics and society in the country.
- Universities can make a contribution to the construction and assertion of national identity in Myanmar, under new, democratic and pluralistic conditions.
- Universities can contribute to strengthening Myanmar's position and reputation in the ASEAN region, on the international arena in general.

In sum, universities can and must fulfill important functions for Myanmar, both domestically and internationally. In order for them to effectively fulfill these functions, several conditions are necessary to be put in place, including:

Institutional autonomy. As discussed extensively in the Practical Handbook on University Autonomy (Matei and Iwinska, 2014), universities cannot fulfill their roles in the society unless they benefit from a reasonable degree of autonomy. Autonomy is a complex, multidimensional concept, but it can be operationalized effectively based on suitable, not too complicated regulations at the national and the institutional level. Autonomy is a part of the larger area of **governance** of higher education. Autonomy is probably both the most urgent and the most unproblematic to address in this area. What is needed is not absolute

autonomy, which does not exist in any country of the world but a reasonable degree of autonomy.

Funding. Universities everywhere cannot work effectively without adequate resources, in particular funding. There are different experiences in the world, both successful and unsuccessful, with regard to the sources, volume or modalities and regulations of funding. Speaking of sources, they usually include a mix of public funding (dominant in Europe) and private (fees paid directly by students themselves or their families, various types of loans, contributions by corporations and other private sector organizations, donations by alumni or other private individuals, funding from international organizations, etc.). This matter is not addressed in the present Handbook but it naturally requires the attention of national authorities. It can be expected that good solutions (policies) could be put in place, despite the difficult economic situation in the country after decades of isolation and lack of consistent economic development.

Quality and quality assurance. It will not be sufficient for universities in Myanmar to benefit from a decent degree of autonomy and resources. In order to fulfill their functions outlined above, they also need to meet certain standards of quality. For this, a good **regulatory framework** is necessary that mandates and ensures, among others, continuing attention to promoting and attaining quality, assessment and control of quality, and providing evidence to the relevant stakeholders about the quality levels attained in universities. This is a key factor for any successful higher education system - in this case it is a pre-condition for Myanmar universities to play their key roles in the transformation of the country. As discussed in the present Handbook, quality in higher education is a complex and somewhat elusive concept. Quality assurance is equally complex, and there are diverse approaches to it in different countries and regions of the world. It is an important characteristic of the outputs of higher education, reflected in characteristics of the university graduates, such as their skills and professional capacity to act in the real world. It is also reflected in the attributes (level, relevance) of the knowledge produced by universities through research, disseminated and put at the disposal of the society for use. In this regard, it is quite obvious why quality and quality assurance are important. If, for example, higher education graduates are not capable of performing effectively in their professions due to "lack of quality" - be it as engineers, doctors, public servants, secondary school teachers, etc. - the universities would have failed their mission. But quality is also about certain characteristics of higher education as a process, not only about the outcomes. Quality of higher education includes aspects of fairness and equity, such as who can become a student (access to higher education), who can graduate from university (completion), and what kind of careers are available. Ethical aspects have quality implications as well, for example, how students or academics are treated in universities and how they interact with each other.

Although quality and efficiency in higher education are not identical, they are related. It is important, for example, to have mechanisms in place to ensure that resources are not wasted. Or, it is not acceptable that of all the students enrolled in a university only very few complete their studies and graduate. It is also a matter of quality and quality assurance whether students are prepared in such a way that they can find jobs after graduation rather than becoming unemployed, and can have successful careers and active lives as citizens.

On the other hand, this discussion is not only about **ensuring quality**, through internal or external mechanisms, although this is very important. This discussion is also about putting in place a system of **accountability**. Universities should be able to document quality aspects and inform their stakeholders about this. For example, they must report to, or inform state authorities about the quality of their work and performance. If universities underperform, how could they contribute to the international prestige of a country? How can they contribute to economic development? A system must be put in place for the state authorities to be able to access on a systematic basis the information about quality in universities and take or promote action to improve performance whenever necessary. As explained in this Handbook, the state is not the only stakeholders when it comes to the accountability of universities. Students, prospective students, parents and alumni must be offered information about the quality of the work and performance of the universities. The university staff is another important stakeholder. In a different way, the same applies to employers, and possibly to civil society organizations as well.

To sum up, quality and quality assurance, along with autonomy, are important elements of a higher education system. In Myanmar, they are key prerequisites for universities to perform their functions in supporting the transformation of the country and its progress.

Question 2. What is Quality in Higher Education?

It is important to raise this question at the beginning of any discussion about quality or quality assurance in higher education. At a first look, the answer might be that either we don't really know what quality is or that it can be many different things. It is often the case that this fundamental question is omitted, especially in more technical discussions or rushed policy debates. The likely reason has to do with the fact that the answer is not entirely straightforward, and there is no unified definition or single measure for quality.

A comprehensive review of quality assurance literature by Kahsay (2012) documents the existing lack of clarity and vagueness about the concept of quality in higher education. To illustrate that, Kahsay (ibid, p. 29) quotes several

prominent higher education experts who rather than trying **to define** quality, **depict** it as being:

- "notoriously elusive" (Gibson, 1986; Neave, 1986; Scott, 1994)
- "slippery" (Pfeffer and Coot, 1991)
- "relative" (Baird, 1998; Harvey and Green, 1993; Middlehurst, 1992; Vroeijenstijn, 1992; Westerheijden, 1990)
- "dynamic" (Boyle and Bowden, 1997)
- "multidimensional" (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002)
- "a philosophical concept that lacks a general theory in the literature" (Green, 1994; Westerheijden, 1999).

Another author claims that "quality assurance has avoided any real examination of the intrinsic nature of quality as related to higher education. In short, twenty years of quality assurance has seen the systematic misalignment of quality culture and academic culture." (Harvey, 2010, p.8). His assessment is based on a review of over 400 publications in the *Quality in Higher Education* academic journal since 1985.

Ferdinand von Prondzynski, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Robert Gordon University of Aberdeen in Scotland sums up the issue in his University Blog (October 18, 2011)[6]:

> "It would probably not be hard to get a consensus around the proposition that universities should aim for high quality in both their teaching and their research. But it is much harder to identify what quality actually is, how it can be recognised and how it can be measured. This is illustrated by the fact that some of the key policy documents on quality assurance for universities go into great detail about the process by which quality should be assured without ever once saying what actually constitutes 'quality.'"

Although there might be no single and universally accepted definition, several authors have attempted to explain and systematize the concept of quality in higher education. A review of existing definitions and approaches to explaining higher education quality could be especially valuable in the Myanmar context for it could help in the development of a country-specific understanding and definition of the concept. The following examples should, therefore, help answer the question:

What is (should be) the meaning (definition) of quality for higher education in Myanmar?

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[6]Blog accessed online at: https://universitydiary.wordpress.com/

Five "ways" to think about quality

Based on a review of various attempts at defining quality in higher education, Harvey and Green (1993) proposed five "ways of thinking about quality", rather than definitions. This typology is frequently referred to in the higher education literature and by practitioners, and offers a good framework for thinking about the topic (Santiago et al., 2008)

i. **Quality as exceptional/excellence –** this view refers to quality as exceptional with regard to the highest academic standards and excellence. By definition, this kind of quality is not attainable by all.

ii. **Quality as perfection or consistency –** this approach looks at quality as a process to eliminate defects and aiming for a consistent or flawless outcome. In this view, quality can be attained by all by focusing on consistency (constantly improving and eliminating flaws).

iii. **Quality as fitness for purpose** – in this view quality is measured by the level of fulfillment of a stated purpose, mission or goals - either by an institution or an academic program; the exact meaning will vary depending on the actual purpose envisioned.

iv. **Quality as value for money** – the focus here is on the output per input ratio, with the aim of gaining more efficiency. In other words, this is similar to a return on investment approach. Quality is attained when a better or higher outcome can be achieved at the same cost, or if the cost can be decreased while the outcome level is maintained.

v. **Quality as transformation** – this approach looks learning that is centered on the student; views quality as value-added and transformation and empowerment of a student through the learning process. In this scheme, quality is achieved when the learning proves transformative for the student.

Figure 1. Illustration of Harvey and Green's five ways of thinking about quality in higher education

Source: The Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors

These five "ways of thinking about quality" can be further illustrated by practical cases from different countries. For example, the notion of "*quality as exceptional/excellence*" can be recognized in some of the national higher education strategies that tend to focus on the development of world-class universities and on improvement or entrance in the global university rankings. By definition, in this context quality is not achievable by all universities. For example, Malaysia in its latest strategy for higher education, among other goals, aims to increase the number of universities in the global university rankings.[7] The German Excellence Initiative can be considered another example, which supports a limited number of the top-level ("excellent") research universities with supplementary competitive funding.

On the other hand, the "*fitness for purpose"* meaning of quality will sound familiar to a European audience as it has been promoted within the European Higher Education Area in recent years. It promotes diversity among the missions of higher education institutions and underlines that quality can be achieved as long as the envisioned mission is fulfilled. This allows different types of higher education institutions to achieve quality within their own categories. For example, both

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[7]See the strategy: https://www.um.edu.my/docs/default-source/about-um_document/media-centre/um-magazine/4-executive-summary-pppm-2015-2025.pdf?sfvrsn=4

teaching-oriented institutions and research universities can achieve quality in their own contexts, if they pursue effectively their respective different missions.

In the United Kingdom, the *"fitness for purpose"* approach was the dominant way of thinking endorsed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in the 1990s. More recently, however, there has been a noticeable shift in the policy and understanding of quality of higher education, putting the students and their experience in the center. Since the 2000s, the notion of *"quality as transformation"* has become a more prominent way of thinking, also endorsed by the QAA in 2009. This approach puts the students and their learning in the center and "empowers them to take an active role in the process in assuring the quality of their own education" (Taylor, 2011, p.1).

Figure 2. Another illustration of defining quality complemented by relevant features and strategies for each way.
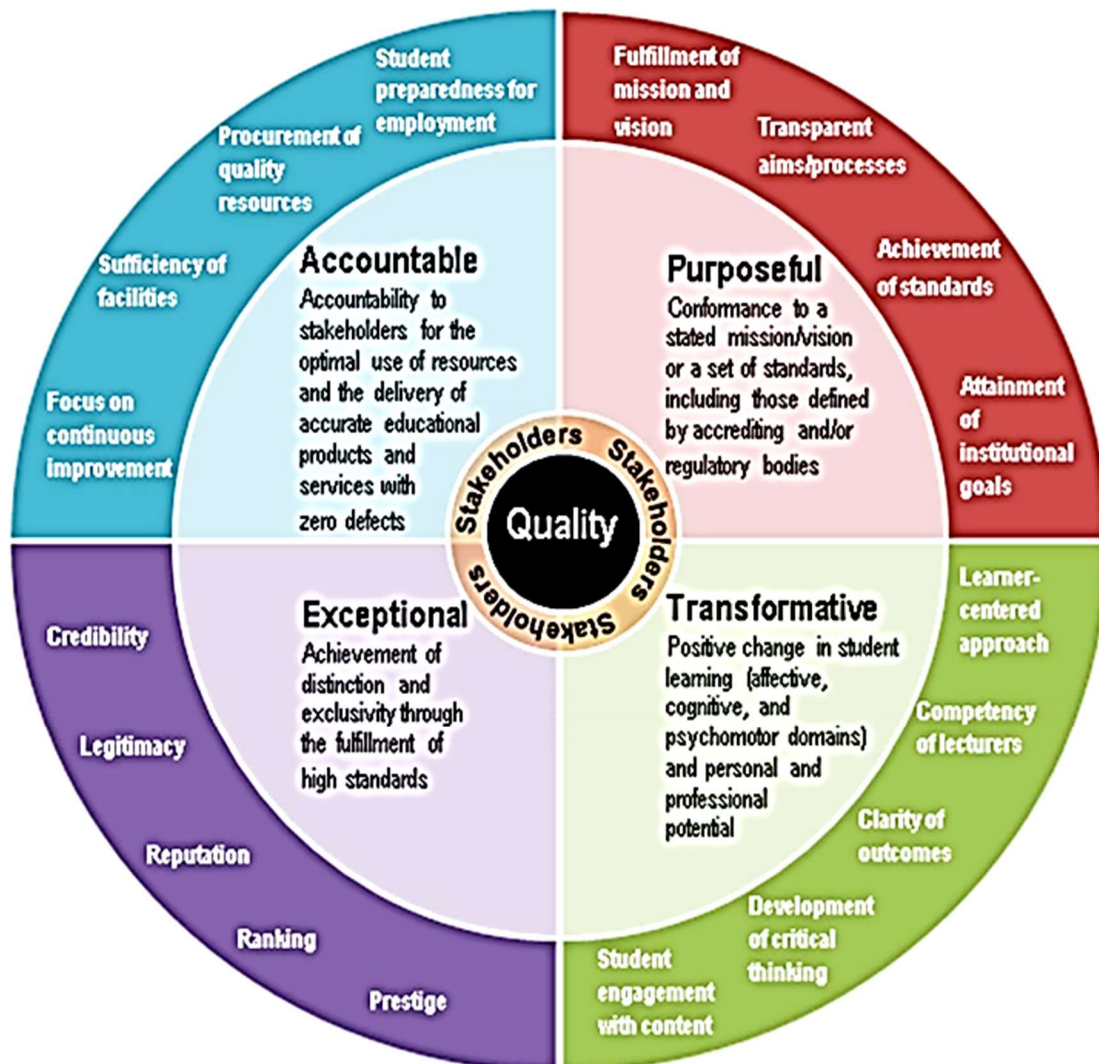
Source: Adopted from Schindler, et. al. (2015, p.7)

Other ways to think about higher education quality

Another way by which quality in higher education can be understood and has been discussed in the literature concerns two additional aspects, namely the context and the stakeholders (Watty, 2003).

The first one links quality to the context and looks at specific elements of the process, such as quality of assessment, student intake, academic programs, teaching and learning or student experience. This way of looking at quality in higher education typically emphasizes quality-related problems such as outdated teaching methods or curricula, too big classes and too high student teacher ratios or lack of sufficient academic resources (Santiago et al., 2008 and SEAMEO RIHED, 2012).[8]

The second angle in understanding quality here examines it from the stakeholders' perspective. It focuses on the premise that there is a diversity of perceptions regarding what quality of higher education is among different stakeholders such as policy makers, academics, students or employers. For example, students are likely to attach quality to study conditions and student-centered teaching & learning. Employers, on the other hand, typically look for specific skills and knowledge in university graduates and judge quality based on that. Academics are likely to be more concerned about the level of interaction between teaching and research, as a defining characteristic of quality. (Santiago, et al., 2008). Following the stakeholders' perceptions approach, some experts suggested that taking into account various stakeholders' views should be key to defining quality in higher education (Kahsay, 2012 after Vroeijenstijn, 2006). But this may prove difficult to achieve in reality as the expectations and perceptions of the stakeholders often diverge and sometimes even contradict each other (Kahsay, 2012). This is the case, for example, with the well-known tension between the focus on academic excellence and theoretical knowledge (promoted by academics) and more practical skills (desired by the employers).

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[8]After Watty (2003) and Baird, 1988; Fry, 1995; Nordvall and Braxton, 1996, p. 262.
SEAMEO RIHED Report (2012) after Reichert (2010)

Figure 3. Combining perspectives and stakeholders views on quality
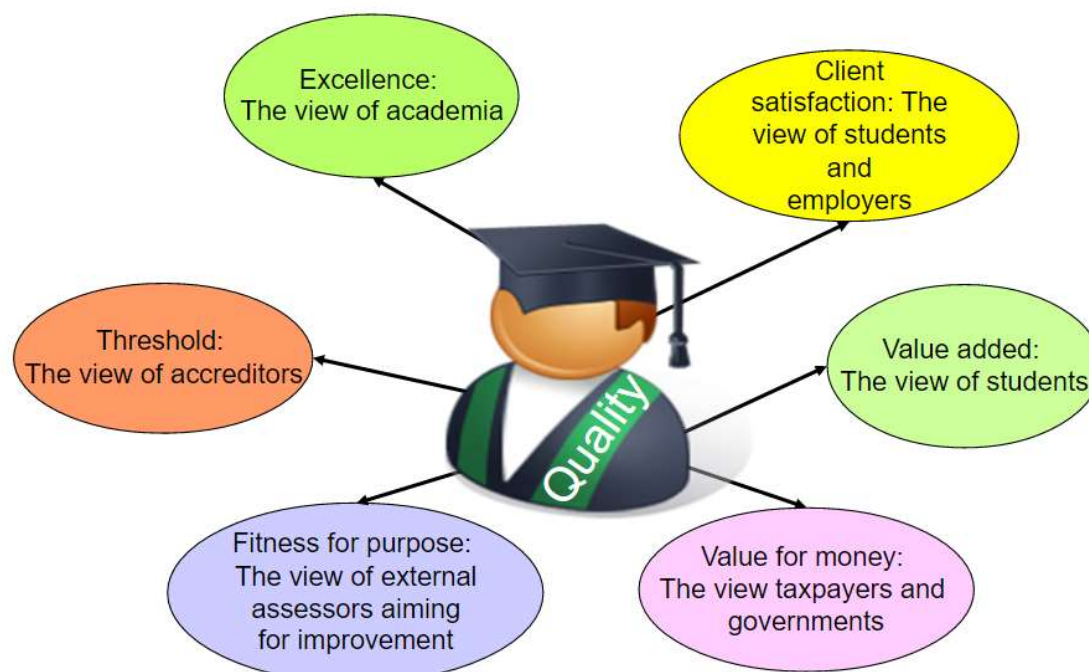
Source: Green, D. What is Quality in Higher Education? Concepts, Policy and Practice 1994

Source: Image adopted from AUN-QA training course presentation (after Green 1994)

Concluding points

This section provided a brief overview on different ways of how quality in higher education can be understood and defined. There is no single way to understand the concept, and an efficient definition should be developed and made fit to the local context, traditions and aims of higher education. The main message or recommendation of this section is that the basic question of *what higher education quality is* should not be omitted in the reform discussions in Myanmar, as it has been the case in some other countries. Development of a definition, or common understanding of quality for a specific national higher education context might be challenging at the beginning but it will be crucial for it will influence the overall design of and give a meaning to the whole quality assurance system.

BOX 1. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Is there a common understanding of what quality means in higher education in Myanmar? What is or should be the main focus of your country's definition of quality?

- How is quality perceived by different stakeholders? By Students? Employers? Policy makers? Parents? Academics?

- Is there a relationship between university autonomy and quality?

Question 3. What is Quality Assurance in Higher Education?

Having discussed briefly the concept of *quality* in higher education, this section looks at the processes and activities aiming to **ensure quality** (once it has been defined). **Quality assurance** (QA) or a **quality enhancement** (QE) system typically consist of a number of connected aspects and serve several purposes such as accountability, control, evaluation, measurement and quality improvement.

While, as some argue, quality has always been part of the academic tradition (Newton, 2006) and quality control was historically based on informal peer reviews and self-regulation (Van Damme, 2011), the situation has significantly changed in recent decades. Today, quality assurance (in some countries referred to as quality enhancement) refers to sophisticated national frameworks, including quality assurance agencies or other dedicated entities, formal quality standards and specific review processes and procedures (such as accreditation) at the level of higher education institutions or at the level of academic programs, or both. Finally, QA systems need to be transparent and provide sufficient information to the public and relevant stakeholders, for example students or parents.

Critics note that the existence of a formal and procedural focus on quality assurance has led, at least in some countries, only to an increased level of bureaucracy and additional paper work rather than to quality improvement.
When it comes to defining quality assurance, similar to the concept of quality in higher education, there are different ways of explaining what exactly it is about. A compilation of the most common definitions of quality assurance that have been put forth in the higher education literature is presented chronologically in *Table 1*, below. This overview illustrates the non-static and complex nature of the concept but it also underlines the possibility for Myanmar to define quality assurance for its own national context.

Table 1. A compilation of definitions and descriptions of quality assurance

Definition or description of quality assurance	Author	Year
It is not about specifying the standards or specifications against which to measure or control quality. Quality assurance is about ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality, however defined and measured, is delivered.	Church	1988
Implies a determination to develop a culture of quality in an institution of higher education, so that everyone is aware of his own part in sustaining and improving the quality of the institution.	Barnett	1992

Considered important for it enables a university become a learning organization.	Green	1994
A systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and improvement.	Vroeijenstijn	1995
A collective process by which a university ensures that the quality of educational process is maintained to the standards it has set itself.	Wilger	1997
Ongoing development and implementation of ethos, policies, and processes that aim to maintain and enhance quality as defined by articulated values and stakeholder needs.	Boyle and Bowden	1997
Policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced.	Woodhouse	1999
A systematic review of educational programs to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained.	UNESCO	2004
A process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process, and outcomes) fulfills expectations or measures up to threshold minimum requirements.	Harvey	2004-2007
The means by which an organization confirms that conditions are in place for students to achieve the standards set by the training organization.	Centrex	2004
All those attitudes, objects, actions and procedures, which through their existence and use, and together with the quality control activities, ensure that appropriate academic standards are being maintained and enhanced in and by each program.	INQAAHE	2005
An all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining, and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institutions, or programs. As a regulatory mechanism, quality assurance focuses on both accountability and improvement (…). Quality assurance activities depend on the existence of the necessary institutional mechanisms preferably sustained by a solid quality culture. Quality management, quality enhancement, quality control, and quality assessment are means through which quality is ensured.	Vlasceanu, Grunberg and Parlea	2007
Quality assurance, in higher education, has become a generic term used as shorthand for all forms of	Harvey	2011

external quality monitoring, evaluation or review. (after SEAMEO RIHED 2012)		
a tool for harmonization	ASEAN, SEAMEO RIHED	2012
Quality is a multidimensional concept that touches not only upon quality assurance (QA) procedures, but also accessibility, employability, academic freedom, public responsibility for higher education and mobility (Galán Palomares et al. 2013). QA itself serves multiple purposes, enhancing learning and teaching, building trust among stakeholders throughout the HE systems and increasing harmonization and comparability in the European Higher Education Area.	European Students' Union	2015
A systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of maintaining and improving quality.	AUN-QA	2015
Quality, whilst not easy to define, is mainly a result of the interaction between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment. Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose.	Standards and Guidelines for QA in the EHEA	2015

Source: Quality assurance definitions adopted from Kahsay (2012) and expanded by the authors.

The range of definitions in this table shows that there can be different foci in the understanding of QA. Some concentrate more on maintaining a set of standards, others emphasize more the improvement and enhancement aspects. Some definitions talk about procedures, processes and mechanisms as being key, while few others mention the culture of quality, or stakeholders' needs. The local/system level understanding of quality and quality assurance will also depend on the purpose the QA is supposed to fulfill.

BOX 2. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Which of the existing definitions is the closest to how quality assurance in higher education is understood and/or practiced in Myanmar?

- What kind of process needs to be put in place in order to introduce quality assurance policies and mechanisms at the national and institutional level in Myanmar?

- What are the key challenges to designing and developing a QA system?

Global higher education trends and quality assurance

The growing popularity and demand for greater focus on quality in higher education in the past two-three decades can be linked to several global developments and trends in higher education. A number of factors have contributed to the emergence of an overall quality assurance movement. However, for each country or region a unique and specific set of developments is likely to be the key factor.

One factor that has led to greater focus on quality assurance in higher education is **massification** and the rapidly **rising student enrollments,** along with the rising public costs and budgetary pressures on national governments. The transition from elite to mass higher education also means a greater economic and social importance of the higher education sector. In line with the "value for money" approach, the need for greater scrutiny over the money spent has emerged as part of quality assurance measures to ensure efficiency and accountability. For example, in Germany the topic of QA appeared on the higher education policy agenda specifically in the context of public spending, growing student numbers but also student drop-out rates, which led to a greater focus on accountability and performance indicators (Rhoades and Sporn, 2002).

Historically, the introduction of the New Public Management (NPM – an approach introduced first in the UK and Australia in 1980's, which tried to make public service more businesslike by using private sectors models) in higher education, with its focus on leadership, competition, efficiency and effectiveness and value for money has been a contributor to greater concerns about quality of higher education. This was the case in the United Kingdom and in the Netherlands in the late 1980s (Enders and Westerheijden, 2014). In this context, the understanding of quality as value for money was more common.

Also, the 1995 General Agreement on Trade Services (GATS) of the World Trade Organization, focusing on trade liberalization opened the doors for "borderless markets for higher education" (Martin and Stella, 2007) and had an impact on the process of **globalization** and **growing global competition** in higher education. Developments such as increasing international student mobility, cross-border provision of higher education also call for more harmonized/standardized understanding and quality assurance procedures (Santiago et al., 2008).

Finally, regional developments in higher education, for example the Bologna Process leading to the European Higher Education Area, have also significantly influenced developments in the area of quality assurance. In Europe, and more recently in the ASEAN countries as well, quality assurance is considered an important harmonization instrument. The 2003 Berlin Communiqué issued by the ministers of education of the EHEA countries, put the topic of quality assurance high on the European agenda asserting that:

"The quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area. Ministers commit themselves to supporting further development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level. They stress the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance. They also stress that consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework." (2003 Berlin Communiqué)

Similarly, developments in the ASEAN countries and the closer cooperation and harmonization of the higher education systems in recent years has already impacted regional QA developments.

Another set of motives behind the increased focus on quality assurance in higher education can be illustrated by the case of the Philippines. Here, quality assurance in higher education is directly related to the country's development aspirations. A presenter from the Philippines at the PACU Academic Management Seminar in 2012 listed the following main factors behind the overall efforts to improve the quality and to develop a QA system in the country (Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities, 2012):

1) the imperative of building a quality nation (poverty reduction by increasing competencies; focus on the Filipino youth, development of regions and communities; catching up with the neighbors);

2) the need to survive in a competitive world

Summary of key points
As presented in this sub-section, country contexts regarding the motivations for introducing or reforming quality assurance systems and practices may vary. In addition to the internal or country-specific circumstances, all higher education systems these days are also influenced by regional and global higher education trends. Without ignoring these external factors, a national quality assurance framework should be developed considering the unique national context and circumstances, and it should aim to fulfill functions and objectives defined and understood at the local, domestic level. The implementation of an "exported" model of a quality assurance without proper translation and adjustment to the local context, understanding and needs is not likely to be successful and will not lead to the improvement of quality in the long run, as illustrated by the case of post-soviet quality assurance reforms in Georgia (Jibladze, 2016), as well as other cases.

Purposes of quality assurance in higher education

When planning and designing a national quality assurance framework, it is crucial to identify the function and purpose quality assurance should serve, as this will determine the ultimate nature of the overall system and detailed processes.

The literature categorizes quality assurance systems based on their fundamental or dominant purpose. One approach distinguishes three distinctive objectives of quality assurance that shape QA frameworks, namely **quality control**, **accountability** and **improvement** (Martin and Stella, 2007).

Another model (Sachs, 1994) categorizes quality assurance systems based on two main purposes:

(1)   Quality assurance for accountability

In this view, the purpose of QA is usually linked with the needs to provide the public with information and certify that the expectations, required minimum quality thresholds/standards or goals in higher education have been met. In publicly funded higher education systems, the state may use QA mechanisms to evaluate the quality and as an instrument to demonstrate efficiency in public spending. A QA process may also serve to help reassure the external stakeholders of maintaining sufficient or high standards of quality (Harvey 2001). The accountability purpose of quality assurance is typically associated with external stakeholders such as the state, the public or regional accrediting bodies, and sometimes international stakeholders. The information collected through quality assurance processes is usually publicly available.

(2)   Quality assurance for improvement

The improvement or enhancement purpose of quality assurance focuses more on the internal audience and higher education institutions. Instead of relying on the one-off certificate confirming that the quality standards have been met, the QA process serves as a more forward thinking cycle for continuous improvement. In this model, the QA process acknowledges both strengths and weaknesses and recommends paths leading to quality improvement. Evaluations in this QA approach are often in the form of recommendations rather than a pass or fail result. The recommendations are typically targeted at an academic audience, whose involvement in the process is crucial to successful quality improvement.

There is a broad discussion in the literature on whether or not the purposes of accountability and improvement are mutually exclusive or whether there can be a balanced approach developed. (Kis, 2005)

The UNESCO-IIEP expert team warns that the improvement/enhancement-centered approaches to quality assurance are more likely to succeed in more mature systems, "where threshold standards have already been met and institutions have developed a basic understanding of self-regulation" (Martin and Stella, 2007).

Enhancement frameworks are not uncommon in Anglo-Saxon higher education systems, for example in Scotland there is *The National Quality Enhancement Framework,* see **Figure 4**.

For the Southeast Asian region, the SEAMEO RIHED report identifies three dominant purposes of national QA systems, including accountability and improvement as above, but also adding the function and purpose of information provision (2012, p.18):

> **1) To maintain quality in higher education, thus meeting the public interest;**
>
> **2) To allow for informed decision-making by students and parents through sharing information on the status of universities, and**
>
> **3) To enhance assessment and assurance of standards**

Another typology of purposes of quality assurance comes from Randall (2008) and appears more in line with the ASEAN practices mentioned above. In this model, QA is to provide:

> **1) Accountability** – to those who pay for higher education. This includes the state, individuals and their families, and employers.
>
> **2) Information** - for those who need to know about the standards that are achieved by students. This includes employers, governments and potential students themselves.
>
> **3) Enhancement** – of the quality of educational provision, through learning from identified strengths and weaknesses, and the sharing and dissemination of good practice, both within and between institutions.

In the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), students play a very important role in higher education policy, including in defining and shaping quality assurance principles. As part of such QA debates, the European Students' Union (ESU) has identified additional purposes quality assurance should fulfil at the national level. According to ESU, the role of quality assurance is:

> **1) To provide transparency and information;**

2) To build trust among stakeholders throughout the HE systems; and

3) To increase harmonization and comparability within the region.

This summary of purposes and functions of quality assurance may help explain the existing diversity across higher education systems. As colleagues in Myanmar discuss the role and purpose of quality assurance in their own higher education system, they may identify specific features and circumstances that will lead to a definition that is applies best in the country. A potential challenge ahead would be find a balance between the different purposes and functions of quality assurance that satisfies both the national needs and the broader regional integration aspirations (in the framework of ASEAN), reflected in a comprehensive and coherent national framework with a buy-in and engagement from all relevant stakeholders.

Question 4. What is the Difference between External Quality Assurance and Internal Quality Assurance?

Quality assurance can be used to describe all activities and mechanisms related to quality, both at the system level (**external quality assurance**) and at the level of teaching and learning in higher education institutions (**internal quality assurance**). In Europe, there is also a third level in the process of assuring quality of higher education. The countries of the European Higher Education Area and their national quality assurance systems are subject to an external review and monitoring at a supranational level, which is designed to check/enhance their effectiveness and compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines. In case of the EHEA, it is the European Association of Quality Assurance Agencies (ENQA), a membership umbrella organization for the national agencies in charge of quality assurance that embodies in the most direct way the third and supranational layer of quality assurance.

External Quality Assurance (EQA)

The external quality assurance (EQA) system concerns regulations, policies and practices that take place at the national higher education system level to assure quality of higher education programs and institutions. In some EQA systems, the focus is on both programs and higher education institutions, while in others it can be on one or the other. At the EQA level, there is typically a dedicated entity(ies) or unit(s) responsible for assuring quality of higher education institutions or programs. These entities, depending on the QA framework design, can be accrediting agencies, evaluation agencies, quality assurance units and similar organizations; as well as those bodies responsible for the superordinate, external quality assurance of these agencies themselves. Depending on the national

context, these agencies can be fully autonomous and independent from the state, autonomous but publicly funded, fully private and independent (such as university membership associations), or in contrast operate as designated agencies within the state structures (*e.g.* part of a ministry or a new unit).

Based on years of practice and experience in quality assurance, it is argued that improvement can be challenging to achieve through external quality assurance approaches, regardless of the official balance between the accountability and improvement functions and roles of the system (Westerheijden, et al., 2007). In relation to this, Harvey (1996) argued that an external quality assurance approach in higher education has a high probability of leading to a culture of compliance in the end. The academic staff may comply with external quality assurance mechanisms to minimize disruptions rather than to improving quality. External quality assurance is also criticized for its inadequacy to address issues related to actual student learning experience (ibid).

Note: *Part 2 of this Handbook describes in more detail the different models of External Quality Assurance*

Internal Quality Assurance (IQA)

In national higher education systems based on the principles of university autonomy, it is typically the universities themselves that are seen as the key agents and experts responsible for assuring quality of higher education. This is the case of the European Higher Education Area, at least at the policy level.
Internal Quality Assurance-centered approaches are considered by some studies to have a greater impact on the actual quality of teaching and learning, in comparison to more accountability-driven EQA mechanisms, which may not guarantee quality improvement. There are cases among the countries of the EHEA that confirm this claim. For example, in some countries proper and well-designed EQA structures and procedures had been set up and implemented but it later turned out that these formal EQA mechanisms were not sufficient for stimulating significant quality improvement and transformation at the level of higher education institutions and teaching and learning. This may have been caused by an imbalanced approach to EQA and IQA, in which EQA was the main focus while internal processes requiring participation of academics and students received less attention. One such case is that of post Rose-Revolution Georgia detailed by Jibladze (2016).

An IQA-centered policy approach to quality assurance putting the task of and responsibility for monitoring quality in higher education in the hands of the universities has been firmly endorsed in Europe in 2003 by the ministers of education in their 2003 Berlin Communique, an important landmark in the creation of the European Higher Education Area. Upon this 2003 recommendation, the IQA and university-centered approaches to quality assurance have been incorporated

into higher education reforms or legislations and put in practice in many countries in Europe.

The *2015 Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG)[9], which is a key document used as a guiding tool (blueprint) for development of a national quality assurance framework in Europe, states the following four principles for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area:

    i.   Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;

    ii.   Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students;

    iii.   Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture; and

    iv.   Quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society.

Note: *Part 3 of the Handbook provides further details regarding the models and practices of Internal Quality Assurance.*

Question 5. What is Quality Enhancement?

As already outlined in the previous section, one of the main purposes of quality assurance is quality enhancement. Policy experts caution that enhancement-centered approaches to quality assurance at the system level are more likely to succeed in mature higher education systems where quality assurance processes have a long history of development and practice (Martin and Stella, 2007). This does not mean that this aspect should not be considered also by the less mature systems.

The case of the Netherlands can serve as an example of a country that has a mature QA system. It was one of the first countries in Europe to introduce quality assurance measures, it has several decades of experience with QA processes and mechanisms by now. The system has transformed several times along the way, including once again in recent years, this time moving from an **accountability-focused** approach to a more **enhancement-centered** system. In the Dutch system, the introduction of institutional audits epitomizes this shift. The rationale behind this reform is explained by van Galen, et al. (2009):

> "This new system aims to focus quality assurance and accreditation in higher education more exclusively on the content

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[9]The Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) were adopted first by the Ministers responsible for higher education in 2005 and then revised in 2015. The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) has been an active participant in the development and later revisions of the Standards and Guidelines. The 2015 ESG are published on the ENQA's website: http://www.enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/

of the programme and is intended to reduce the administrative burdens of internal and external quality assurance processes. Essentially this revision of the accreditation system should increase academic ownership of quality assurance systems within higher education institutions and introduce a 'light touch approach' based on 'high trust' earned during 25 years of external quality assurance procedures (…). The new two tier accreditation system is intended to steer back to a more quality enhancement led approach. The introduction of this new system means that external quality assurance and accreditation will be more open to creativity and diversity in higher education and will focus less on descriptions of procedures."

From this explanation, one can derive that according to the policy makers in the Netherlands, the previous EQA system had led to significant administrative burdens and insufficient academic ownership of the quality assurance process within universities. In order to avoid similar shortcomings, colleagues in Myanmar could from the beginning keep in mind these two factors: academic ownership of the QA process, and the risk of significant administrative and bureaucratic burdens a QA system may bring into a higher education system (as opposed to a "light touch approach").

The academic ownership is particularly important in this context as in some countries (like the Netherlands before this reform) and institutions the QA process has indeed become a specialization or a domain for a limited group of QA experts only (often university administrators) rather than an academic quality driven process engaging all higher education stakeholders within institutions and reaching to the level of everyday classroom teaching and learning. These topics are also briefly discussed in the context of quality culture and internal quality assurance sections below.

A quote from the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)[10], a document that, as discussed above, serves as a common roadmap for quality related aspects in the EHEA countries, recommends what could be an optimal relationship between accountability and enhancement:

> "At the heart of all quality assurance activities are the twin purposes of accountability and enhancement. Taken together, these create trust in the higher education institution's performance. A successfully implemented quality assurance system will provide information to assure the higher education institution and the public of the quality of the higher education institution's activities (accountability) as well as provide advice and recommendations on how it might improve what it is doing (enhancement). Quality assurance and quality enhancement are

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[10] See EUA page for details on ESG 2015: http://www.eua.be/Libraries/quality-assurance/esg_2015.pdf?sfvrsn=0

thus inter-related. They can support the development of a quality culture that is embraced by all: from the students and academic staff to the institutional leadership and management (2015, p. 7)."

Figure 4 illustrates the main principles of an enhancement-centered national framework, as developed in Scotland.

Figure 4. The National Quality Enhancement Framework in Scotland
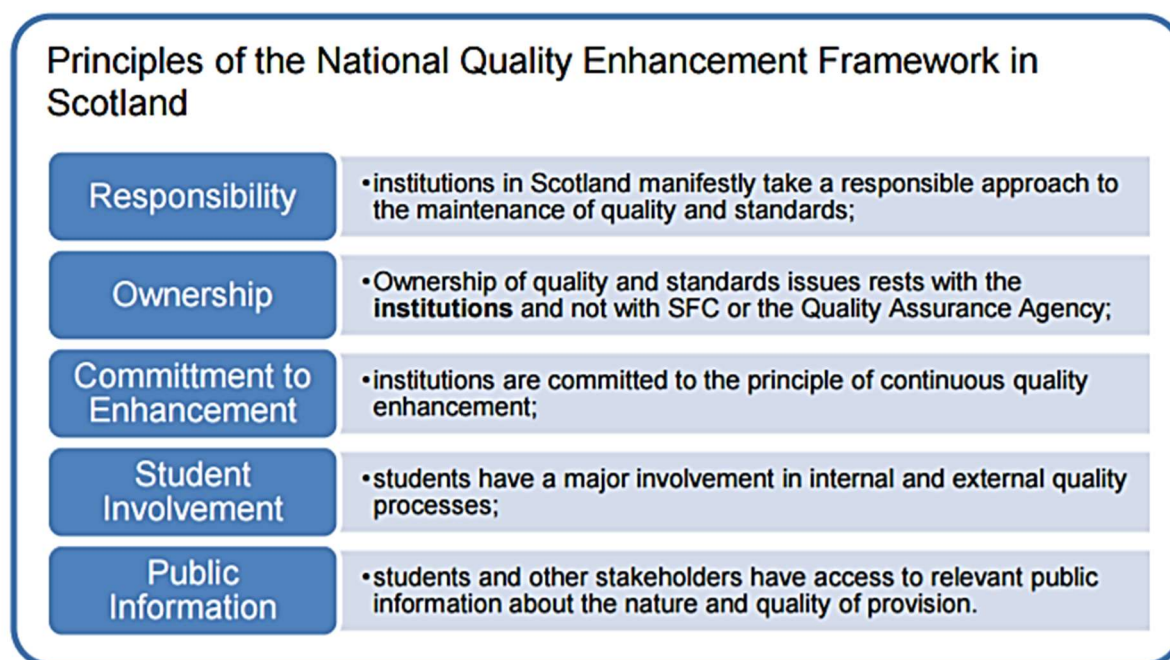
Source: University of Glasgow Academic Quality Framework, p. 6[11]

Question 6. What is Quality Culture?

Quality culture has become a widespread concept in Europe in the context of quality assurance in the past decade. Several comprehensive studies have been conducted in this area, for example by the European University Association (EUA). Since 2002, the EUA have led several large European projects focusing precisely on the area of quality culture including:

- *Quality Culture Project* (2002-2006)[12]
- *Examining quality culture in higher education institutions* (EQC, 2009-2012)[13]

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[11] Accessed online at: http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_127773_en.pdf
[12] Project information on the EUA page: http://www.eua.be/activities-services/projects/past-projects/quality-assurance-and-transaparency/quality-culture-project.aspx
[13] http://www.eua.be/activities-services/projects/past-projects/quality-assurance-and-transaparency/eqc.aspx

- ***Promoting quality culture in higher education institutions*** (PQC, 2012-2013),[14] and the latest project
- ***Empowering Universities to fulfill their responsibility for Quality Assurance*** (EUREQA, 2012-2015)[15]

The EUA's focus on "quality culture" has been deliberate. In the introduction to the Quality Culture Project, the EUA explains the rationale behind this approach.

> "When speaking of quality, it is easy to revert back to such managerial concepts as quality control, quality mechanisms, quality management, etc. These concepts, however, are not neutral. They convey a technocratic and top-down approach that will only backfire in academic settings. Therefore, the term "culture" was chosen to convey a connotation of quality as a shared value and a collective responsibility for all members of an institution, including students and administrative staff." (http://www.eua.be/activities-services/projects/past-projects/quality-assurance-and-transaparency/quality-culture-project.aspx)

Moreover, the findings of the EUA project underlined that "the introduction of internal quality processes provides an essential balance to the requirements of external accountability. Quality culture can serve to improve institutions: external evaluation procedures can serve to provide the required accountability to the public" (ibid)

These findings have led to further analysis and comprehensive studies by the EUA and its partners and can be a useful resource for both higher education institutions and policy makers.

A definition of quality culture developed by the EUA in 2006 has been adopted in many higher education studies in this area. It states that quality culture is:

> "organisational culture that intends to enhance quality permanently and is characterised by two distinct elements: a cultural/psychological element of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality and a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating individual efforts." (Kottman et al., 2016, p. 7 after EUA, 2006)

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[14] http://awww.eua.be/activities-services/projects/past-projects/quality-assurance-and-transaparency/PQC.aspx
[15] http://www.eua.be/activities-services/projects/past-projects/quality-assurance-and-transaparency/EUREQA.aspx

Figure 5. An overview of the quality culture concept in higher education developed by the EUA
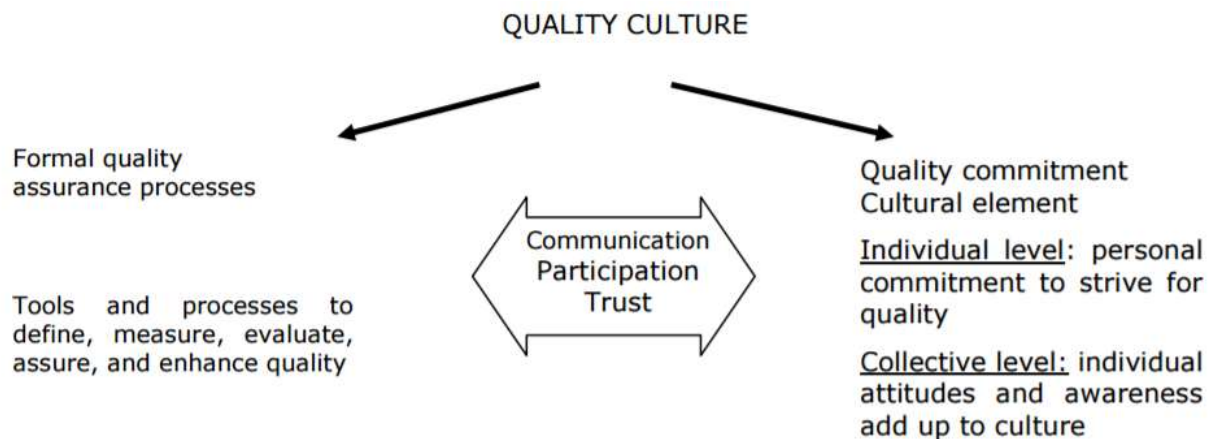
Source: Adopted from a presentation by A. Gover and T. Loukkola, "A crash course in promoting quality culture", EQAF 2015[16]

Others describe that quality culture can be seen as the ability of the institution or program to develop quality assurance implicitly in the day to day work and marks a move away from periodic assessment to ingrained quality assurance (Gitta, 2014). Harvey's Analytic Quality glossary defines it as: "a set of group values that guide how improvements are made to everyday working practices and consequent outputs" (Harvey, 2004-17).

Recent analyses have specifically looked into the management of quality cultures (Kleijnen et al, 2011; Kleijnen, 2012; Berings et al, 2011, Sattler et al, 2013). For example, a study of the association of Dutch universities of applied science showed that academic programs are more efficient when systematic quality assurance procedures were embedded in clear communication structures and open value systems allowing for quality learning rather than for quality control (Kleijnen et al 2012).

Based on Mary Douglas' Grid-Group scheme, four ideal-types of quality cultures can be defined. This typology can help identify the starting point for an institution with regard to the organizational culture (Kottman et al., 2016)

I. **Responsive Quality Culture** – primarily evaluating its own practice in the light of external quality requirements and contributing to an improvement agenda;

II. **Reactive Quality Culture** – focused on avoiding external threats (e.g. a negative reputation). A culture which sees quality as something that is

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[16]Presentation accessed online on December 20 2016 at: http://www.eua.be/Libraries/eqaf-2015/parallel-plenary-6_ag_tl.pdf?sfvrsn=0

'imposed' from the outside environment and, thus, focuses on individual aspects of quality;

III.   **Regenerative Quality Culture** – typical for a 'learning organization' in which quality is systematically embedded in daily operations;

IV.   **Reproductive Quality Culture** – emphasizes the maintenance of the status quo (changes lead to internal resistance).

With these ideal types of quality culture, researchers Harvey and Stensaker intend to provide a theoretical tool that helps understanding what kind of quality culture is already existing in an organization/higher education institution. Moreover, university leaders should be aware that establishing a quality culture does not necessarily mean bringing a new element into their institutions. Instead, it is primarily a process of changing an already existing quality culture (ibid).

Question 7. How Are Standards Used in Quality Assurance?

It is often the case that the quality assurance process makes use of standards; it is the so-called "standard-based approach to quality assurance". Standards can be developed and applied to an institution as a whole and specific areas of operation, for example in the case of institutional accreditation, or there can be standards applied to given academic programs.

The regional accrediting agencies in the U.S. are well known for using well elaborated but relatively simple standards for accreditation. As an example, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges defines standards for accreditation as "an articulation by the higher education community of what a college or university must do in order to deserve the public trust. They also function as a framework for institutional development and self-evaluation."[17] CIHE uses a total of nine standards that range from institutional mission and purpose to institutional effectiveness and integrity.[18]

As explained by Martin, a "standard" represents a measure or a principle to which an institution or program should adhere, and by which one's quality is judged. Standards refer to 'the specification of aspects, elements or principles to which one should conform or by which quality is judged'. (Martin, 2015)

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[17]See: https://cihe.neasc.org/standards-policies/standards-accreditation
[18]A detailed presentation of the standards is available online at
https://cihe.neasc.org/sites/cihe.neasc.org/files/downloads/Standards/Standards_for_Accreditation.pdf

In Europe, the ESG are a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in higher education. The ESG are not standards for quality, nor do they prescribe how the quality assurance processes are implemented, but they provide guidance, covering the areas which are vital for successful quality provision and learning environments in higher education. The ESG should be considered in a broader context that also includes the European qualifications frameworks (EQF)[19], ECTS (the European credit system) and diploma supplement that also contribute to promoting the transparency and mutual trust in higher education in the EHEA.

Standards can refer to both quantitative indicators and qualitative ones. More and more systems combine both quantitative indicators with qualitative information. Mature EQA systems tend to leave more room to institutions and review experts for assessing whether standards have been achieved, especially in qualitative approaches, for example when evaluating the institutional mission (Kis, 2005).

BOX 3. Overview of institutional standards for accreditation by the U.S. Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)

Standard I: Mission and Goals
Standard II: Ethics and Integrity
Standard III: Design and Delivery of the Student Learning Experience
Standard IV: Support of the Student Experience
Standard V: Educational Effectiveness Assessment
Standard VI: Planning, Resources, and Institutional Improvement
Standard VII: Governance, Leadership, and Administration

Source: MSCHE

Question 8. Who Are the Stakeholders in Quality Assurance?

The stakeholder approach to quality in higher education outlined above in this Handbook leads us to examine closer who the stakeholders relevant for quality assurance are.

It is important to bring up this aspect of relevant actors/stakeholders interested in the question of quality in higher education, and also to discuss their potential role in the QA processes and systems. As indicated earlier, one way of defining quality is to look at the different perceptions of stakeholders. As already mentioned, the authors of the 2008 OECD report warn that "differences in

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[19]The EQF is a common European reference system which will link different countries' national qualifications systems and frameworks together https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/leaflet_en.pdf

<u>perceptions of quality by different stakeholders are at the root of misunderstandings and conflicts between the different actors of quality assurance systems</u>." It is a debated topic whether all groups of stakeholders should be actively engaged in the QA process and at which stages (Santiago et al., p. 262).

Anyone who directly takes part in or has the ability to affect the achievements or performance of higher education institutions should be considered a stakeholder, and therefore relevant for and directly or indirectly involved in quality assurance. Stakeholders can be internal to higher education institutions: university leadership, teachers, researchers, administrators, and students. They can also be external: quality assurance and other external agencies, employers, industry representatives, government or funding agency, alumni, local governments, prospective students and parents, general public and media (Sencila, 2013 after Freeman's definition). Please refer back to *Figure 3*, which illustrates both purposes and stakeholders' perspective within a quality assurance system.

Based on the different quality assurance approaches, several key groups of stakeholders (at different levels of engagement) in quality assurance can be identified: academics (both domestic and foreign), students, governments and authorities, employers or industry representatives, professional associations.

Other authors view the higher education stakeholders by grouping them into four key categories that are crucial to defining the quality (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003). These are:
   1) Providers (e.g., funding bodies and the community, taxpayers);
   2) Users of products (e.g., students);
   3) Users of outputs (e.g., employers); and
   4) Employees of the sector (e.g., academics and administrators)

Looking at the demand and supply division, Watty (2003) identifies four key groups on the supply side of higher education: governments, quality assurance agencies, higher education institutions and individual academics. On the demand side, the author singles out: students, employers, parents and society at large. The roles and level of engagement of these various groups in quality assurance policies and practices differ across countries. (Santiago et al., 2008)

Moreover, each stakeholder group tends to have a different perspective and definition of quality. For example, students may associate quality with the academic program in which they study, their learning or with the overall student experience and student support structures at their university. Conversely, employers tend to be more concerned with quality in terms of the final product, which may refer to the qualifications the graduates possess (Harvey & Knight, 1996). Academics, on the other hand, may be more concerned about the academic standards of excellence in their respective disciplines. Therefore, in order to define quality and attempt to establish a culture of quality in higher education, all

stakeholders should be involved in the discussion to ensure that different perspectives and needs are incorporated (Shindler et al. 2015 after Bobby, 2014; Cullen et al., 2003). The authors of the OECD report quoted above (Santiago et al., 2008) note that from an accountability perspective (also mentioned as best practice), it would be important to involve the stakeholders in both the design and implementation of the quality assurance system.

The State as a stakeholder in QA

In Europe, the EQA systems are usually set up and funded by the government with involvement of the higher education institutions and other stakeholder groups, such as the students, or in some cases industry representatives or employers. The oldest tradition of accreditation, however, comes from the United States, where voluntary associations rather than government authorities, either regional/institutional, specialized or professional, operate and accredit based on institutional reviews (Van Damme, 2011). These agencies are not state authorities, but governments rely on accreditation by these voluntary associations for establishing eligibility for various forms of state funding (ibid).

Government bodies often play an important role in the quality assurance of higher education. In the US for instance, the United States Department of Education, a federal agency is one of the two institutions, next to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation that carry out the recognition of accrediting agencies (Eaton, 2004). Similarly, in Japan independent evaluation bodies must be recognized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Sciences and Technology (Kimura et al., 2004 and Kis, 2005).

Students as stakeholders in QA

In Europe, students are very important stakeholders in both the design and implementation of quality assurance systems. The best example is the crucial role of the European Students' Union in development and later revisions of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in EHEA. The students' voice is important for both internal quality assurance and external quality assurance. In many countries in Europe, it is required that external review panels/groups involve students as members.

In the UK, the students' opinions are also highly valued at the national level. Every year, a public national student survey is conducted, which ranks the students' satisfaction with the quality of programs and institutions. As Figure 6 below indicates, students are also core stakeholders in the national quality enhancement framework.

Figure 6. Example of student involvement as an element of a national quality enhancement system in Scotland

Elements of the Quality Enhancement Framework in Scotland

Internal Review	Student Involvement	Public Information	Enhancement Themes	External Review
University-led programme of monitoring and review	Effective involvement of students in quality management through a variety of mechanisms	improved forms of public information on quality	a national programme of enhancement themes	Institution level
encompases all elements of the UoG Academic Quality Framework				
should make reference to the UK Quality Code	supported by the national development service, *sparqs (student participation in quality Scotland)*	targetted to address the different needs of stakeholder groups, including students and employers	aimed at developing and sharing good practice in learning and teaching in Higher Education	ELIR - "Enhancement-led Institutional Review"

UK Quality Code for Higher Education

Source: University of Glasgow Academic Quality Framework

Employers as stakeholders in QA

There is still room for improvement when it comes to involvement of employers in quality assurance processes. Table 7 in Part 2 of the Handbook shows that as of 2008 employers were not too extensively involved in the QA processes. Kis (2005) notes that Denmark was one of the few countries that had employers as members of the review panels.

Employers and industry representatives certainly have strong interest in the quality of higher education as it impacts on the quality of graduates, who are their future employees. However, in terms of formal involvement of this stakeholder group in the QA design and implementation process, the reality is challenging. In some countries, where higher education is closely linked with the industry or regional development (for example some countries in Northern Europe), industry representatives/employers have a role in the process. In some other cases where the links among HEIs, state and industry are not the strongest and not efficiently coordinated, this has been less practiced.

Still there is some knowledge and evidence of what employers think and how perceive certain aspects of higher education quality. For example, a large survey was recently conducted in the United States by the Association of American

Colleges and Universities (see **_Figure 7_**, below). The results clearly illustrate diverging stakeholders' perceptions of quality. For example, 66% of the surveyed students felt that college education prepared them well in the area of critical/analytical thinking, while only 26% of employers agreed with that. In fact, according to the surveyed employers, the university graduates were the least prepared, contrary to their own assessment and perception, in the areas of: critical/analytical thinking; team work; and written communication.

This diversity in perceptions of quality among different stakeholders is an important aspect to consider when developing own definitions of quality in higher education. The authors of the 2008 OECD report: "Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society, Volume 1" highlight that "<u>these differences in perceptions of quality by different stakeholders are at the root of misunderstandings and conflicts between the different actors of quality assurance systems</u>" (Santiago et al., p. 262). Others adds that "the problem is not a different perspective on the same things but different perspectives on different things with the same label" (ibid after Harvey and Green, 1993).

Figure 7. An example of how diverging students' and employers' views can be.

Employers give college graduates low scores for preparedness across learning outcomes; students think they are better prepared.

Proportions saying they/recent college graduates are well prepared in each area*

	Employers	Students
Working with others in teams	37%	64%
Staying current on technologies	37%	46%
Ethical judgment and decisionmaking	30%	62%
Locating, organizing, evaluating information	29%	64%
Oral communication	28%	62%
Working with numbers/statistics	28%	55%
Written communication	27%	65%
Critical/analytical thinking	26%	66%
Being innovative/creative	25%	57%
Analyzing/solving complex problems	24%	59%
Applying knowledge/skills to real world	23%	59%
Awareness/experience of diverse cultures in US	21%	48%
Staying current on developments in science	21%	44%
Working with people from diff. backgrounds	18%	55%
Staying current on global developments	18%	43%
Proficient in other language	16%	34%
Awareness/experience of diverse cultures outside US	15%	42%

*8-10 ratings on zero-to-ten scale

Source: Inside Higher Ed, January 20, 2015

It is evident that the understanding of higher education quality is diverse among relevant stakeholder groups. This represents a considerable challenge for the development of a comprehensive and credible quality assurance system for higher education. Still, as recommended by Green (1994) it would be important to "define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder uses when judging quality, and for these competing views to be taken into account when assessments of quality are undertaken."

Although challenging, it might be a worthwhile exercise to try to map out all the stakeholders' views and perceptions of quality of higher education in Myanmar. How much diversity and divergence, if any, could there be among the different higher education stakeholder groups? To what extent could these views be reconciled within a national QA framework?

Question 9. How to Assure Quality in Internationalization and International Cooperation?

This question is included in the present Handbook given that international cooperation in higher education, especially within the ASEAN but also beyond, has already begun in Myanmar and is likely to intensify in the coming years and to influence significantly the work of universities in the country.

In this context, international cooperation is used as an umbrella term covering a number of activities including but not limited to international student and academic faculty exchanges (both ways), international university partnership agreements (both bi-lateral and consortia and networks), international research projects, development of joint degree programs with partner universities as well as possible development of branch campuses of foreign institutions that has been the case in several neighboring countries.

Internationalization at the level of higher education institutions and international cooperation in higher education more generally can be an effective tool leading to higher education quality improvement. The post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe have greatly benefited from special funding schemes provided by the European Union with the aim to enable academic faculty and staff exchanges, student mobility as well as joint capacity building projects in higher education or development of joint and double degree programs in English.

For example, in Lithuania, a higher education internationalization strategy has been considered an important tool for improvement of quality of higher education[20]. A study on the effects of internationalization on the quality of higher education concluded that although "(…) [it] can present both opportunities and

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[20] http://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/hep.2013.6

challenges to small states (…), the overwhelming consensus among the range of stakeholders (…) was that the benefits of internationalisation far outweigh the threats and disadvantages" (Urbanovic and Wilkins 2013). Although Myanmar is not a small state like it was the case of Lithuania, some of the observations may still be relevant.

At the same time, it might be wise to discuss the possibility of establishing guiding principles or even more specific guidelines for such international endeavors to ensure the best possible effects on the higher education quality development. For example, Estonia has been very conscientious in this respect, and established a set of guidelines for ensuring quality standards in international activities of higher education institutions. In 2007, collaborative efforts of the Estonian Rector's Conference, the Ministry of Education and Research and a national Foundation Archimedes responsible for the "Study in Estonia" campaign led to the development of an "Agreement on Good Practice in the Internationalisation of Estonia's Higher Education Institutions".[21]

This topic of internationalization and in particular joint programs has been also discussed at the European level. In 2014 the EHEA members have endorsed a ***European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes***, which is available online at: https://www.eqar.eu/topics/joint-programmes.html

Other examples of international activities

An example from Hungary: a university established a special international fund for young academics with good knowledge of the English language, who could apply to spend a semester at a chosen institution abroad (university leave made possible). The condition of this scheme was that upon their return, the academics were required to develop a new course in English for the home university according to the international academic standards. It is important to emphasize that in this case the home university created the necessary conditions for these academics to be able to develop and implement such new courses in English; the university had sufficient autonomy in this area (Iwinska, 2010).

A different scenario can be illustrated by a case of an international fellowship scheme in the 1990s. In the early years of transition, many academics, typically junior faculty, from the post-Soviet countries received fellowships to spend time at foreign institutions and participate in course curriculum development trainings, often in disciplines that were new for the region's higher education. An evaluation of the scheme (unpublished report) showed that, in some cases, these internationally-trained academics, upon their return to home institutions, were not able or given the opportunity to put their international experience and new

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[21]A copy can be found here:
http://www.ut.ee/sites/default/files/ut_files/heade%2Btavada%2Bkokkulepe-toimetatud%2Beng.pdf

curricula into practice. As a result some of the courses were never introduced at home institutions. The reasons for such outcomes included a number of obstacles ranging from rigid administrative structures, lack of institutional autonomy in academic affairs or possible tensions in the relationships of the younger and internationally-trained generation of academics and the senior staff (often occupying university leadership positions, *e.g.* department chairs) that had been more resistant to change in that particular context.[22]

Under the theme of internationalization and international cooperation, we can also mention the phenomenon of cross-border and international accreditation practices that exists for both academic programs and institutions and in the professional fields. This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter of the Handbook.

Question 10. What Are the Challenges and Shortcomings Related to Quality Assurance in Higher Education?

Having briefly touched upon various recurring themes in the area of quality assurance, it is necessary to also map out some of the challenges and shortcomings related to both development and implementation of quality assurance in higher education. This section will only provide a snapshot of some of the issues experienced by countries that have gone through the process of developing a national quality assurance framework for higher education. Some of these issues have been already mentioned in the previous sections. Without providing an in-depth analysis, the section provides a list of possible "red flags" that should be carefully considered by colleagues in Myanmar.

Potential challenges related to development of quality assurance systems are briefly listed below.

- As mentioned earlier, deciding on a suitable design for a national QA framework that combines accountability, does not omit the enhancement purpose of QA, and tries to integrate different stakeholders' perspectives and needs can be a challenging task.
- In addition, for the case of Myanmar another challenge could be combining the national higher education system needs with the ASEAN guidelines and aspirations into one coherent and effective QA system that will lead to quality improvement for higher education in Myanmar and that will also contribute to the attractiveness and competitiveness of the ASEAN higher education.
- The risk of QA development leading to anxiety, resistance and potential conflict among some of the stakeholder groups. This is linked with the fact that quality assurance is typically associated with evaluation and judgments (Reisberg, 2010).

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[22] This example comes from an unpublished review of an international fellowship scheme.

- Potential resistance from academics who may view quality assurance as an external process imposed on them. In Canada, quality assurance can be sometimes viewed by academics as something "done to them" rather than an integral part of what they do (Randall, 2008)
- The risk of over-bureaucratization of the quality assurance processes. A situation when QA becomes a formal procedure (sometimes purely administrative and not academic) rather than an opportunity for genuine reflection and improvement.
- The risk of insufficient academic buy-in in the development of QA or academic ownership of the quality assurance process, which prevents the QA from having an impact on the quality of the everyday operations and teaching and learning. (for example, Geven, et.al, 2015).
- Quality assurance as a higher education policy tool may also be used for achieving goals other than quality assurance and quality enhancement. In the EHEA, QA policies have played and continue to do so an important role as a harmonization instrument among the participating countries in the European Higher Education Area.
- Lo (2014) suggests that a set of QA policies introduced in Singapore in 2009 had also served a different purpose; namely as an instrument to help reshape the higher education landscape in order to respond to certain political pressures such as negative local attitudes regarding the formerly promoted globalization-focused higher education policy.

These few examples of dilemmas and challenges are mentioned only to signal some of the possibly more sensitive aspects related to development and implementation of national QA systems and mechanisms. These processes are often if not always placed within a particular national context, higher education landscape and circumstances that may not always be free from political factors or even tensions. It may be important to consider, when a new system is thought through and developed, whether the QA process should fall under an existing ministry or whether it should be placed within a new institution.

On a more practical side, the comprehensive SEAMEO RIHED report on quality assurance models in the ASEAN region also points out to some of the obstacles and challenges related to the implementation and effective management of quality assurance systems. The most commonly mentioned problems across ASEAN countries listed in SEAMEO RIHED were (2012, p.5):

- Lack of resources to support quality assurance initiatives including insufficient funding
- Lack of quality experts (for example to conduct external reviews)
- Limited tools and knowledge and also a lack of awareness of quality assurance implementation
- Restrictions at a policy level as quality assurance development strategies are rare

- Quality assurance responsibilities sometimes falling within several government departments.
- Lack of leadership for respective countries to strengthen their national quality systems.

A higher education expert, Liz Reisberg (2010), lists additional challenges based on the case of Argentina in the mid-1990s, namely the lack of trust that impedes on the process of self-assessment. Specifically, in Argentina there was a highly politicized higher education landscape, with lack of trust between universities and the government, lack of trust between peers and lack of trust within an institution.

PART 2. EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (EQA)

A comprehensive framework for Quality Assurance or Enhancement of higher education at the system level (national or regional) typically comprises of the Internal Quality Assurance processes (IQA), based and managed by the higher education institutions themselves, and the External Quality Assurance (EQA) mechanisms and procedures, coordinated and carried out by a responsible entity outside the university.

The European University Association promotes a coherent quality assurance policy for Europe, based on the belief 'that **institutional autonomy** creates and requires responsibility, that universities are responsible for developing internal quality cultures and that progress at the European level involving all stakeholders is a necessary next step'. Moreover, in the Graz Declaration, the purpose of a European dimension of quality assurance was defined as "to promote **mutual trust and improve transparency** while respecting the diversity of national contexts and subject areas" (Tutko and Naumov, 2014 after Graz Declaration 2003, p.9).

The topics of the relationship between the EQA and IQA and the balance between the two types of QA processes is actively debated by higher education practitioners. The general argument is that an EQA system is more likely to be effective and stimulate quality improvement when the IQA mechanisms are developed (often inspired by the EQA process) and systematically carried out by the universities not only for the EQA purpose but mainly for their internal institutional learning process. The self-assessment process, which is conducted at the level of universities (with academics and their teaching at the center) but also represents a starting point for the external process, is considered key to achieving an effective QA system. Otherwise, there is a risk of the EQA leading to compliance rather than improvement. (Martin, 2016).

This chapter outlines some of the key issues for consideration, specifically concerning the role and characteristics of the EQA processes within a broader QA system. The following chapter continues by mapping out issues and practices relevant for IQA.

2.1. Purpose of EQA

Various purposes of quality assurance have been already detailed in earlier sections. *Table 4* presents a matrix of tools for the three purposes of control, accountability and public assurance and improvement. In addition to the specific quality needs, an EQA system will also need to build trust among stakeholders, and as in case of ASEAN contribute to the harmonization efforts of higher education systems in the region (based on UNESCO-IIEP, 2006).

Table. 4. EQA options

Purpose	Quality control	Accountability/public assurance	Improvement/guidance
Preferred mechanism	Licensing	Accreditation/assessment	Quality audit
Framework for QA	Standard-based approach	Fitness for purpose + fitness of purpose	Fitness for purpose
Procedures	Mostly external assessment	Both external and internal assessment	Mostly self-assessment
Nature	Compulsory	Compulsory or voluntary	Voluntary

Source: Adopted from UNESCO-IIEP, 2006, Module 1, p. 32

2.2. Regulatory frameworks

In Europe, Quality Assurance systems are usually detailed and/or regulated in the higher education legislation. In most of the countries of the European Higher Education Area (except Estonia and Switzerland), the relevant higher education laws explicitly mention the responsibility of higher education institutions to assure quality, and formally require the institutions to develop internal quality assurance systems or mechanisms (The European Higher Education Area in 2015, p. 88).

For example, the 2009 Law on Higher Education of Lithuania states that:

> "Higher education and research institutions shall be responsible for the quality of research (artistic) activities, studies and other activities. They must publicly announce the quality indices of their activities and foster the culture of the quality of activities regarding higher education and research together with assessment institutions." (Article 40)

It is possible that having too specific and micro-level regulations regarding the QA system for higher education in the national legislation might in fact become an obstacle and slow down the future development and improvement of the QA system, especially when any changes in the QA process would require a change in the HE Law. On the other hand, including an outline of the overall purpose of the QA system, its objectives, stakeholders and their role, and the general principles in the national legislation, could provide coherence, legitimacy and guidance for all the individual elements of the QA system.

2.3. Main approaches to EQA

The rationale behind setting up a national EQA system in a specific way and also its purpose differ from country to country. There are many factors that will have an impact on what is considered the most appropriate and/or suitable purpose and

structure of a QA system for the local context. These factors can be internal and linked to the history, cultural and political contexts and traditions. On the other hand, there can also be important external factors stemming from developments in the region (like ASEAN for Myanmar) or more globally in higher education, or coming from as close as a neighboring country. The identified purpose and setup of the framework may also represent a compromise among different higher education stakeholders. It is also important to remember that QA frameworks are dynamic and change over time. For example, as discussed above, the QA system in the Netherlands, has evolved (including major transformations and changes of the system purpose) over the past three decades (Enders and Westerheijden, 2014).

Concerning the EQA, there are three most common approaches that are all present both in Europe and in the Asia Pacific region (SEAMEO RIHED, 2012). It is **accreditation**, **assessment or evaluation**, and **audit or review**. They are not mutually exclusive and can often be part of one QA framework.

2.3.1.   Accreditation

Accreditation is the most common and well-known approach both in Europe and in the ASEAN region.

Some of the characteristics of an accreditation process, which will always be linked to the overall purpose and design of the QA system, are highlighted below:

- Accreditation can be used for assuring quality of new or existing academic programs (program accreditation). Accreditation can also be used at the level of new or existing higher education institutions (institutional accreditation).
- Accreditation process can also be used at the level of Quality Assurance agencies. An external national body (for example the Accreditation Council in Germany) accredits the accrediting agencies or quality assurance entities.
- Accreditation can be voluntary or mandatory for programs or institutions (or both).
- Accreditation process at the level of HEIs is a more comprehensive and time (and resources) consuming in comparison to program accreditation. It normally covers a spectrum of areas including: the university mission and planning practices; governance and management model; aspects related to teaching and learning, learning outcomes and student assessment; institutional resources and infrastructure; student infrastructure and facilities; student profile and support services; research activities; and internal quality assurance processes (Martin and Stella, 2007).
- Accreditation can be a one-time procedure (*e.g.* certifying new programs) or a cyclical process (*e.g.* every 5 or more years)

- Accreditation can establish a legal status and basic legitimacy. It can function as a licensing mechanism or be directly linked to access to public funding. For example, in the U.S. accreditation is voluntary as such but it is a pre-requisite for gaining access to the Federal funding such as loans for students.
- Accreditation process typically relates to the accountability and information purposes quality assurance. It checks and assures whether programs or institutions are meeting the set standards or thresholds.
- The outcome of an accreditation process is usually a binary format such as yes/no or pass/fail. There are also systems offering an in-between outcome such as a conditional/provisional accreditation, which gives an institution time for improvement.
- The accreditation process can be divided into four main phases:
  - Self-assessment at the level of HEI resulting in a report
  - External assessment – site visit (peer review) also leading to a report
  - Review and decision/judgment by accreditation body
  - Follow–up (compliance and re-accreditation process)

2.3.2. Assessment or Evaluation

The Assessment or Evaluation approach is in many aspects similar to Accreditation and the two can be combined. For example, in Europe the assessment process is common at the program level. It is an output focused approach that reviews the teaching and learning processes including pedagogy and teaching methodologies. As indicated in Table 5, the guiding question asked in an Assessment process is: How good are your outputs?

The Assessment/Evaluation process can be based on the tools of self-evaluation; peer review or site visit. For example, in Poland quality assessment is the main approach of the EQA, and it is used at the level of academic programs as well as academic units within universities (faculties or departments).

The assessment outcomes are usually in a form of grade or opinion as opposed to a pass/fail result. In Poland, the quality assessment scale consists of four main quality grades:

- outstanding
- positive
- conditional (provides a concrete follow-up assessment date)
- negative (loss of license to offer degrees)

2.3.3. Audit or Review

Quality Audit differs from Accreditation and Assessment, mainly because it focuses on the presence and efficiency of internal quality-related mechanisms and

processes at a HEI or at a program level. As summarized in Tables 5 and 6, Quality Audit (or Review) can serve several functions:

- checks whether there are internal processes and procedures for assuring academic quality standards,
- checks whether these processes are being implemented,
- checks whether the internal processes are effective,
- and whether the set objectives are being achieved.

The focus of a Quality Audit is primarily on the internal quality assurance system, and not on checking the actual quality. A Quality Audit can be conducted at the level of a higher education institutions or programs. It does not lead to a "yes/no" decision but offers a descriptive and unique to the object of analysis, review or audit report as its output. These are as such difficult to compare across programs or institutions. (Stella & Department of Education, 2008, p. 7) (Vlãsceanu, Grünberg, and Pârlea, 2004). As highlighted by IIEP-UNESCO experts, unlike Accreditation or Assessment, a Quality Audit does not result in a concrete certification or proof of achievement of a certain level of quality (based on established standards) (UNESCO- IIEP, 2006).

Table 5. A comparison of main approaches to EQA

Activity	Question	Emphasis	Outcome
Accreditation	Are you good enough to be approved?	Comprehensive (mission, resources, processes)	Yes/No Pass/Fail
Assessment Evaluation	How good are your outputs?	Outputs	Grade (including Pass/Fail)
Audit Review	Are you achieving your own objectives? Are your processes effective?	Processes	Description, qualitative

Source: Typology of quality assurance approaches based on Woodhouse (1999) and adopted from Santiago et al. (2008, p.266).

Based on the 2008 review of the QA systems worldwide, it appears that the accountability-driven approaches using accreditation dominate among higher education systems. Accountability-driven approaches that use both accreditation and assessment tools could be found (as of 2008) in: Chile, Mexico, South Korea, Croatia, Estonia, Poland, Belgium, France, Greece, the Netherlands and Switzerland. In contrast, the quality improvement-centered approaches could be found only in the UK. However, the most recent reforms in the Netherlands summarized earlier in in Part 1 may indicate that the Netherlands is indeed moving

away from its former accountability-centered QA system (Santiago et al., 2008, p.267-268)

The comparative data also shows that a number of countries have opted for a mixed approach, one which to a certain extent combines quality-improvement and accountability purposes of QA. These mixed systems were more common in the Asia Pacific region - Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Nordic Europe - Finland, Norway, Sweden and Czech Republic, or Portugal (ibid).

Table 6. International comparison of QA approaches

	Switzerland	Czech Republic	Japan	Australia	UK	Mexico
QA approach	QA for accountability	QA for accountability and improvement	QA for accountability and improvement	QA for accountability and improvement	QA for improvement	QA for accountability
QA tools/ mechanisms	Accreditation: HEIs and program level -	Accreditation: program level Audit: HEIs	Accreditation: HEIs level Audit: HEIs, faculties	Accreditation: HEIs and program level Audit: HEIs	Audit: HEIs	Accreditation: program level and private HEIs Assessment: program level
Responsible entity	Government authorities Intermediate agencies	Intermediate agencies	Government authorities Intermediate agencies	Government authorities Intermediate agency	Intermediate agency	Intermediate agency
Stakeholders involvement in monitoring panels	Domestic & foreign academics students employers' representatives	Domestic & foreign academics (sometimes: employers' representatives, students, regional authorities)	Domestic & foreign academics stakeholders from the industry	Domestic & foreign academics employers' representatives	Domestic academics Scotland: domestic academics and students	Domestic academics

Source: Table based on the data from Santiago et al., 2008, p. 267-268

2.4. Other EQA-related choices and dilemmas

There are many more aspects to be considered when developing a new QA assurance framework and the Handbook cannot cover all the issues. However, some of the typical choices or dilemmas QA "developers" may be facing are briefly mentioned in this section.

EQA process: voluntary or mandatory

There are diverse models across higher education systems including strictly voluntary EQA systems, mandatory ones and other in-between options. In some cultural contexts, it seems quite natural that such processes would be compulsory while in other educational traditions, this is unthinkable.
Each model represents some advantages and disadvantages, which should be considered and analyzed in the national context, also considering the nature of quality culture.

Countries with larger higher education systems and many institutions, should consider and assess their initial existing capacity to carry out the envisioned QA processes and evaluations (IIEP 2006). As it was mentioned earlier in Question 10, the lack of internal capacity and lack of experts to conduct external reviews is one of the most commonly mentioned challenges and problems concerning implementation of the EQA systems; not to mention the financial aspects or the time.

It has been argued that when "quality improvement is the aim, a voluntary mechanism is a better option than a compulsory tool. Only when HEIs are motivated and committed to change can the EQA system operate as a development tool for higher education. Strong academic commitment is needed for EQA to become an instrument for quality enhancement." (UNESCO-IIEP Training Module 1, 2006, p. 40). At the same time others argue that higher education institutions might need incentives to initiate a comprehensive self-assessment process, which equally requires time and resources. If not making it compulsory, there could be certain incentives (rewards) set up at the system level that would motivate the universities to initiate the internal quality assurance system development.

EQA focus: higher education institutions, programs, or both

Another aspect to be decided when designing an EQA is the scope of the process. Should EQA focus only on the level of higher education institutions as or also on the level of academic programs? Or should it be both as it is practiced in some countries. Should the process cover both public and private higher education institutions or not? Should the process focus on all programs or selected ones only, as in some countries where the focus is on teacher education or other vital professions?

Some countries focus their EQA only on the higher education institution-level, and accredited universities can establish all types of programs (including at PhD level). The OECD data suggests that in 2008 this was the case in Norway, UK, Australia, Sweden – in case of public HEIs, and Mexico – in case of autonomous HEIs. Other

countries have EQA procedures both at the level of universities and programs and they can be either mandatory or voluntary.

Institutional EQA may be the preferred option in a system in which quality varies widely between institutions and when institutional management is rather weak. It may therefore be a strong way of strengthening the management capacity of an HEI.

Programmatic EQA focuses on individual academic programs, many of which prepare students for a specific profession. Each program may have its own policy on student recruitment, standards and curricula, and in addition be subject to requirements arising from national qualification frameworks. It therefore makes sense to quality assure individual programs. In particular, programmatic EQA may assess whether an educational program is related to the professional expectations for entry into a specific profession.

Over and above this, institutions may offer programs of different quality in different disciplines that cannot be recognized by institutional EQA. Programmatic EQA is therefore a strong tool to address issues of deficient quality at the departmental level, where improvement decisions must be taken. It has been noted that advantages "of an institution-wide review are that it asks for fewer experts, is less time consuming and less expensive. Disadvantages of such reviews include little involvement at grass-roots level, insufficient feedback at discipline level, and lack of recommendations for further curriculum improvement. On the other hand, a programme-wide approach allows to go into more depth and details, it involves individual staff members and results in feedback from the committee and recommendations for improvement. Yet, this approach is more time-consuming and expensive than the institutional review (Kis, 2005, p.17 after Vroeijenstijn, 1995)."

2.5. EQA responsible entity

Almost all quality assurance systems in Europe have an agency coordinating the EQA process. External quality assurance agencies are usually established either by the national or regional governments; they can also be established by higher education institutions themselves, often at the requirement of the government.
To some extent, the affiliation of the QA agency has implications for autonomy in its functioning. Although most QA agencies – including those established and funded by their governments - claim some level of autonomy from government, nongovernmental bodies can obviously claim the greatest independence in decision-making. (UNESCO – IIEP Training Module 1, 2006)

There are four types of affiliation for establishing a QA agency (ibid):
1. A state or quasi-governmental agency
2. A private entity fully independent

3. A quasi-governmental buffer body
4. A body established without the government or HEIs, for example a professional council.

BOX 4. Example of Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, UK, and its mission

Our mission is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education wherever it is delivered around the world. We are independent of government and of higher education institutions, and act in the public interest, for the benefit of students. If the public is to trust us and to have confidence in our judgments, it is essential that QAA is, and is seen to be, an organization that is operationally independent.

Source: QAA website (http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us)

BOX 5. European Standards developed for Quality Assurance Agencies

1. ***Activities, policy and processes for quality assurance*** - Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

2. ***Official status*** - Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognised as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

3. ***Independence*** - Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

4. ***Thematic analysis*** - Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

5. ***Resources*** - Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

6. ***Internal quality assurance and professional conduct*** - Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

7. ***Cyclical external review of agencies*** - Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

2.6. Funding of EQA

In Europe, the source of funding of quality assurance in higher education is the government, but higher education institutions are also a source of funding in one

third of the cases (ENQA, 2008)[23]. Higher education institutions pay a membership or subscription fees or accreditation or other types of fees for a specific process or activity.

In Denmark, the evaluation system is owned by the government, while the Dutch system has both a government owned and a university owned level (Thune, 1998). The QAAs that are not funded by government are in virtually all cases funded by the evaluated higher education institutions. Agencies of this type exist in Belgium, France, Latvia, Romania and the VSNU in Netherlands (ENQA, 2008).

Further sources of funding, according to ENQA surveys (2003; 2008), include the National Assembly (France), donations (Akkreditierungsrat in Germany) and joint funding by central government, national higher education funding councils, higher education institutions and students (Higher Education and Training Awards Council in Ireland, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK).

2.7. EQA at regional level

Europe provides one of the most successful examples of developing EQA at regional level. The Bologna Process, launched in 1999 by 29 countries, aimed at building an integrated European Higher Education Area (EHEA). EHEA was officially established in 2010 and it currently counts 48 European countries as members (basically all countries of the continent). According to the official website of EHEA, through this process "countries, institutions and stakeholders of the European area continuously adapt their higher education systems making them more compatible and strengthening their quality assurance mechanisms. For all these countries, the main goal is to increase staff and students' mobility and to facilitate employability"[24].

A key action line of the Bologna Process and EHEA is quality assurance. It is also one of the most successful parts of the Process. This was made possible by the voluntary adoption of European-wide policies and institutions, and by the development models, standards, tools and practices. Such are the European qualifications frameworks and the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG), already discussed in this Handbook, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), or the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR[25]). One of the key actors in developing EQA at regional level in Europe is ENQA. ENQA "promotes European co-operation in the field of quality assurance in higher education and disseminates information and expertise among its members and towards stakeholders in order to develop and share good practice and to foster the European dimension of quality assurance"[26].

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[23] Under: Costes, N. et al. (2008)

[24] http://www.ehea.info/

[25] http://www.eqar.eu/

[26] http://www.enqa.eu/

European-wide developments in EQA had noticeable effects on quality assurance at the national and institutional levels within EHEA, and they have often served as models or source of inspiration for other regions of the world, including currently in ASEAN.

Box 6. European Standards for development of External Quality Assurance

1. *Consideration of internal quality assurance* - External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes.

2. *Designing methodologies fit for purpose* - External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

3. *Implementing processes* - External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include - a self-assessment or equivalent; - an external assessment normally including a site visit; - a report resulting from the external assessment; - a consistent follow-up.

4. *Peer-review experts* - External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

5. *Criteria for outcomes* - Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

6. *Reporting* - Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

7. *Complaints and appeals* - Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

2.8. EQA at international level

The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) was established in 1991. It is an example of an international membership agency for quality assurance units across countries. Its core membership are the regional and national quality assurance and accreditation agencies. The main purpose of INQAAHE is to collect and disseminate information on current and developing theory and practice in the assessment, improvement and maintenance of quality in higher education. Through this information sharing, and otherwise, it is intended that the Network should:

- Promote good practices in the maintenance and improvement of quality in higher education;
- Facilitate research into the practice of quality management in higher education and its effectiveness;
- Be able to provide advice and expertise to assist the development of new quality assurance agencies;
- Facilitate links between accrediting bodies especially insofar as they operate across national borders;
- Assist members to determine the standards of institutions operating across national borders;
- Permit better-informed international recognition of qualifications;
- Be able to assist in the development and use of credit transfer schemes to enhance the mobility of students between institutions within and across national borders;
- Enable members to be alert to dubious accrediting practices and organizations.

(Based on the INQAAHE's website: http://www.inqaahe.org/)

PART 3. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (IQA)

As already discussed throughout the Handbook, Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) refers to all kinds of policies, activities and mechanisms related to evaluation and improvement of quality, and developed and carried out by and within higher education institutions. University approaches to IQA are considered as more improvement-oriented, and they tend to focus more on the quality of teaching and learning aspects and the concept of organizational quality culture. Among experts, it is the IQA systems that are considered key to effective and successful Quality Assurance process.

There are thousands of universities in the world and since the majority of countries have been implementing national quality assurance reforms in higher education, it is plausible to claim that most universities have also been engaged, more or less actively, in development and implementation of internal quality assurance approaches.

A key argument in favor of placing IQA at the center of a national quality assurance stresses that: "internal quality assurance is more formative in nature and likely to lead to continual quality improvement efforts and the development of quality culture in institutions" (Kahsay, 2012, p.39 after Barnett, 1994; Askling, 1997, and Wiclund, et al., 2003). Other argument is that only self-understanding can lead to improvement or that in order to improve, quality assurance mechanisms should be placed close to teaching and learning activities (ibid after Barnett, 1999 and Wilger, 1997).

The IQA systems encompass a wide range of institutional policies, values, structures, and mechanisms. They can be independently developed by higher education institutions, in systems where there is high level of institutional autonomy, or they can follow certain pre-determined criteria or guidelines established at the system level.

In Europe, the topic of IQA has been in the focus in the context of the development of the European Higher Education Area, and taking into consideration the variety and diversity of higher education systems and institutions. The EHEA Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG, already mentioned several times in the handbook) represent a set of standards, as the title indicates, for the member countries to rely on when developing, assessing or redesigning their quality assurance systems. The ESG are divided into three parts, and one of them outlines ten standards developed specifically for Internal Quality Assurance (see *Box 7*, below). These Standards have been widely discussed with the involvement of all relevant groups of stakeholders. The ESG are broad enough that they can serve a guiding tool also for non-EHEA countries. In short, these standards emphasize the following aspects of an IQA system: institutional policy level, development of related processes, the importance of student-centered teaching and learning, the

student study-cycle from admission to degree, the importance of competences of the teaching staff, the availability of student support systems and academic resources, public information provision and systematic internal reviews of study programs ensuring their improvement.

Box 7. European Standards (ESG) for Internal Quality Assurance

1. **Policy for quality assurance** - Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

2. **Design and approval of programs** - Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programs. The programs should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

3. **Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment** -Institutions should ensure that the programs are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

4. **Student admission, progression, recognition and certification** - Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

5. **Teaching staff** - Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.

6. **Learning resources and student support** - Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.

7. **Information management** -Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyze and use relevant information for the effective management of their programs and other activities.

8. **Public information** - Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programs, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.

9. **Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programs** - Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programs to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

10. **Cyclical external quality assurance** - Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis.

3.1. Self-assessments, self-reviews

An institutional self-assessment (self-review, self-study or self-evaluation) is a core element in most quality assurance systems. It is carried out by higher education institutions as part of their IQA but it is also closely linked with, and forms a foundation for the external quality assurance process. A self-assessment "helps the institution check how far it is achieving its strategic mission and goals, and it allows it to prepare an action plan for further development" (Thune, 1998). Self-assessments are practiced by many higher education institutions by now, however, their nature and how they are conducted vary significantly (Brennan and Shah, 2000).

In the U.S., self-reviews (typically known as self-studies) have a long tradition and are widely practiced as part of the institutional accreditation process. The U.S.-accredited universities, therefore, typically have well-developed processes for self-studies, and are used to related systematic collection and analysis internal data. (Brennan, 1997). In Europe, self-assessment is a slightly newer practice but it is also widely spread by now. The European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (ENQA) reports that self-review is used in the majority of quality assurance procedures in Europe. Typically, the national agencies in charge of quality assurance (*e.g.* quality assurance agencies) provide guidance or manuals for institutions on how to conduct a self-review; training on the other hand is not often provided to the institutions (Thune, 1998).

Finally, although not directly IQA-related, the system-level quality assurance or accrediting agencies usually also undergo self-reviews or self-assessments themselves as part of the broader QA framework. In Europe, this is included in the ESG 2015. Self-assessment reports of the quality assurance or accrediting agencies are typically reviewed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA -see for example a recent self-assessment conducted by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders NVAO[27]).

At the higher education institution level, continuous quality improvement, as depicted by the ESG, requires organizational and leadership commitment to self-evaluation at all levels.

Although the practice of self-reviews aims at quality improvement, which is a positive development, there is also a large body of literature that speaks about wide-spread resistance among academics and higher education professionals against this practice (Geven et al., 2015 after Apple 2005; and Ball 2003). This can represent a potential challenge when developing a new system-level and institutional level quality assurance in Myanmar.

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[27] Report available at:
https://www.nvao.com/system/files/pdf/ENQA%20Review%202017%20NVAO%20Self-Assessment%20Report_0.pdf

For those less accustomed to the practice of self-assessment, the challenge is how to make it a genuine and useful internal reflection and not a mere preparation and data collection for the purpose of an external assessment and site visit by reviewers.

3.2. Other IQA tools and practices

Higher education institutions employ a variety of tools and practices with the aim to ensure and improve quality. For example, an IQA systems can include sets of institutional quality assurance policies or internal guidelines. There are often special units set up at universities to help manage the quality assurance processes. For example, at the University College Dublin (UCD), there is a university Quality Unit that "provides advice and assistance to academic and service units undertaking quality review, with a view to developing and maintaining an institutional culture of ongoing enhancement in teaching, learning and research" (http://www.ucd.ie/quality/aboutus/).

Another important element of an effective IQA system is the data collection and analysis process. For example, an institution can develop a set of performance indicators for monitoring quality according to its standards and aspirations. In addition, a variety of institutional surveys are also frequently employed as a tool helping with systematic assessment; these can be at the level of course evaluations, program evaluations or institution-level ones. See *Appendix 1* and *2* for examples of two surveys used by Central European University. The first one is course evaluation that is completed anonymously online by every CEU student for each course they complete (after the end of the course). The data from course evaluation is used by instructors but it is also considered by department heads and in the process of academic review and promotion. The other example, *Appendix 2*, is an institutional exit survey that all graduating students complete. This data also feeds in into program and institutional assessments and improvements.

3.3. Quality in teaching and learning

Quality assurance, and in particular internal quality assurance, usually cover the quality of teaching and learning. It is important to briefly emphasize the importance of this area of focus. This section highlights some of the findings of a large 2010 study by Fabrice Henard at the OECD's Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) unit titled: "Learning Our Lesson: Review of Quality Teaching in Higher Education." (Henard, 2010). The study analyzes a total of nearly fifty individual institutional initiatives focusing on quality teaching from twenty higher education institutions. Some of the key recommendations of this study are mentioned in the remainder of this section. The author summarizes that

the factors required for an effective policy on quality of teaching have to combine both:

- external factors – at the system or regional level that can help "foster a climate conducive to the recognition of teaching quality as a priority;" and

- internal factors at the level of HEIs such as institutional environment, leadership that can help facilitate the development and implementation of initiatives focusing on the quality of teaching" (ibid, p.5).

In addition, the author also groups all the quality of teaching-oriented initiatives and support mechanisms at the level of higher education institutions analyzed by the study into three broad categories that can help universities develop their own approaches (ibid, p.6). The three categories encompass:

1. **Institution-wide and quality assurance policies** – which include projects designed to develop a **quality culture at institutional level**, like policy design, and support to organization and internal quality assurance systems.

2. **Program monitoring** – which includes actions that aim to measure the design, content and delivery of study programs (typically through program evaluation).

3. **Teaching and learning support** – which includes mechanisms, initiatives and support systems that focus on both the teachers on one side, and the students/learners on the other, or on both. The examples mentioned in this category include: continuing education programs for faculty, pedagogy enhancement, student support (e.g. mentoring and career advice), support for student learning (focused on inputs, such as the introduction of new pedagogical tools, or on outputs, such as the development of certain abilities for the students)(ibid, p.6).

Moreover, Henard observes that "the success of teaching quality initiatives supported by the institution depends mainly on the commitment of the heads of departments who promote the quality teaching spirit and allow operational implementation. In large multidisciplinary institutions that have shifted to highly decentralized systems, departments have ownership of their activities and therefore a high level of accountability. Impetus and co-ordination of the heads of departments by institutional leaders through appropriate facilities and platforms for discussion are crucial to quality improvements (ibid, p.7).

Last but not least, Henard also emphasizes, what this Handbook did at the very beginning, the importance of defining the concept or notion of quality within a higher education institution and more broadly at system level. The author finds that

"in many cases, institutions tend to offer programme evaluation or training sessions for faculty though the **notion of quality** remains vague and unshared internally. A better approach is to first explore the kind of education students should possess upon graduation and the types of learning outcomes the programmes should provide to ensure economic and social inclusion of students. Institutions working in this way **have defined what quality means and what the role of the faculty in the learning process could be**. This reflection requires time, conviction, motivation and openness. Lastly, the support that the faculty would need to accomplish their educational mission and the conditions that would allow the students to fulfill the learning objectives can be more clearly defined" (p.7, emphasis added).

PART 4. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The present Handbook endeavors to present and discuss briefly, in an applied, hands-on perspective, the most important concepts in the area of quality and quality assurance in higher education. It also presents examples of practices, successful or less so, in this area. The purpose of the Handbook is to inform the national discussion and decision making regarding practical steps to be taken towards the introduction of effective quality assurance policies, regulations, and mechanisms. This is a key matter to be addressed as part of the overall reform of higher education in Myanmar, one that can be handled effectively taking an incremental, step-by-step approach.

The value of the Handbook, we hope, is in the detailed information it provides about most important practical aspects of quality assurance and also in identifying key specific questions to be addressed in Myanmar.

In this final chapter, we summarize a few more general, concluding thoughts.

1. The introduction of a modern, effective quality assurance system in Myanmar is a precondition for universities to fulfill their functions as part of the overall transaction of the country. These functions include contribution to economic and social development, assertion of national identity, and democratic development of the country.

2. Autonomy and quality appear to be the most important and also practical two areas of reform in higher education.

3. Myanmar is not the first country in the world that needs to develop quality assurance almost from zero. The experience of other countries proves that this is eminently doable and that the results justify fully the efforts.

4. The experience of other countries also provides useful lessons regarding effective choices and models, challenges along the way, and mistakes to be avoided.

5. The development of a national quality assurance framework should not be done by importing models from elsewhere as such. A national system should be designed considering local circumstances, corresponding to clearly defined national objectives. It should aim to attain objectives defined and understood at the local level.

6. The international experience shows that there is no one single definition of quality. In the process of designing a national quality assurance system, it will be important to define clearly how quality is understood in Myanmar and articulate a definition that is explicitly linked to the functions of higher

education that are considered important for Myanmar. Development of a definition, or common understanding of quality for a specific national higher education context, might be challenging at the beginning but it will be crucial - for it will influence the overall design of and give meaning to the whole quality assurance system.

7.   Quality assurance itself can possibly fulfill different functions, detailed in this report, such as quality control, accountability, information and improvement. In the design of a national quality assurance system, these various functions must be explicitly taken into account. Quality is a multidimensional concept that touches not only upon quality assurance procedures, but also accessibility, employability, academic freedom, public responsibility for higher education, and mobility. It serves multiple purposes, such as enhancing learning and teaching, building trust among stakeholders throughout the higher education systems and increasing regional and international harmonization and comparability.

8.   The road to an effective higher education system, based on autonomy and promoting quality, can be clearly identified. Progressing on this path is doable, while there are natural obstacles to be overcome. For the specific area of quality assurance, a number of possible dangers and challenges are identified and presented, as detailed under Question 10 section in this handbook.

9.   A very useful distinction in the area of quality assurance is between external and internal quality assurance. Both are important. While internal quality assurance appears to have a more direct and positive effect on quality improvement, the international experience shows that this is mostly the case in developed systems. It might therefore be useful for Myanmar, given the current level of development in higher education, to focus more at the beginning on external quality assurance. The experience of the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which had to go to a similar process of transition, may provide good arguments in favor of the introduction of accreditation. At the same time, steps can be taken in the area of internal quality assurance, beginning with measures that are easy to introduce, such as regular student feedback.

10.   Regional developments in quality assurance might be particularly relevant for Myanmar and should be pursued. While taking part in ASEAN processes in this area is valuable, experiences from other regions of the world, in particular when they have more developed regional frameworks, could prove useful.

11.   Quality assurance is an area in which multiple stakeholders interact. The potential challenge ahead would be find a balance between the different

purposes and functions of quality assurance that satisfies both the national needs and the broader regional integration aspirations (in the framework of ASEAN), reflected in a comprehensive and coherent national framework with a buy-in and engagement from all relevant stakeholders. Although challenging, it might be worthwhile to try to map out all the key stakeholders' views and perceptions of quality of higher education in Myanmar.

12. Developing a formal national quality assurance system appears to be a priority for the country. This will involve national regulations, institutions, and mechanisms. Simultaneously, a process should start to build a culture of quality in higher education institutions. This may take time and could be done along the way, but it must not be neglected.

APPENDIX 1. EXAMPLE OF A COURSE EVALUATION FORM

COURSE EVALUATION QUESTIONS, CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

Course:	0001 - test
Department:	Admin
Faculty:	admin test

If you have questions or comments about this survey, click here to send a message to the survey administrator.

Part 1: Overall evaluations

The following question is to be answered using a 10 point scale where "1" is the lowest and "10" is the highest score. Only one response is allowed for each question.

Course

1 Please assess the overall quality of the course.
   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9
   ○ 10 ○ Don't know/Not applicable

Part 3: The course

The following questions are to be answered using a 10 point scale where "1" means 'do not agree at all' and "10" means 'totally agree'. Only one response is allowed for each question.

Assessments

2 I clearly understood the course requirements, and what is expected of me in the course.
   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9
   ○ 10 ○ Don't know/Not applicable

3 The course has achieved its stated goals.
   ○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5 ○ 6 ○ 7 ○ 8 ○ 9
   ○ 10 ○ Don't know/Not applicable

4   Course materials advanced my understanding of the subject

◯ 1   ◯ 2   ◯ 3   ◯ 4   ◯ 5   ◯ 6   ◯ 7   ◯ 8   ◯ 9

◯ 10   ◯   Don't know/Not applicable

5   Please assess if the workload was in line with the number of credits?

☐   too low

☐   about right

☐   too high

You may select up to 1 items for this question.

6   What I liked best about this course:

7   What I liked least about this course:

Part 2. Overall evaluations

The following question is to be answered using a 10 point scale where "1" is the lowest and "10" is the highest score. Only one response is allowed for each question.

Your instructor   (test, admin)

8   Please assess the overall performance of your instructor.

◯ 1   ◯ 2   ◯ 3   ◯ 4   ◯ 5   ◯ 6   ◯ 7   ◯ 8   ◯ 9

◯ 10   ◯   Don't know/Not applicable

Part 4: Instructor

The following questions are to be answered using a 10 point scale where "1" means 'do not agree at all' and "10" means 'totally agree'. Only one response is allowed for each question.

Assessments   (test, admin)

9   The instructor was well prepared for the course.

    ○ 1   ○ 2   ○ 3   ○ 4   ○ 5   ○ 6   ○ 7   ○ 8   ○ 9

    ○ 10   ○   Don't know/Not applicable

10 Presentations by the instructor were clear.

    ○ 1   ○ 2   ○ 3   ○ 4   ○ 5   ○ 6   ○ 7   ○ 8   ○ 9

    ○ 10   ○   Don't know/Not applicable

11 The classroom environment encouraged student participation.

    ○ 1   ○ 2   ○ 3   ○ 4   ○ 5   ○ 6   ○ 7   ○ 8   ○ 9

    ○ 10   ○   Don't know/Not applicable

12 The instructor treated the students in a respectful and professional manner.

    ○ 1   ○ 2   ○ 3   ○ 4   ○ 5   ○ 6   ○ 7   ○ 8   ○ 9

    ○ 10   ○   Don't know/Not applicable

13 Feedback was given throughout the course.

    ○ 1   ○ 2   ○ 3   ○ 4   ○ 5   ○ 6   ○ 7   ○ 8   ○ 9

    ○ 10   ○   Don't know/Not applicable

14 The instructor was available for appointments and consultations outside of class.

    ○ 1   ○ 2   ○ 3   ○ 4   ○ 5   ○ 6   ○ 7   ○ 8   ○ 9

    ○ 10   ○   Don't know/Not applicable

15 Additional suggestions to the instructor:

If you have questions or comments about this survey, click here to send a message to the survey administrator.

APPENDIX 2. EXAMPLE OF A STUDENT SATISFACTION SURVEY

1 Exit survey 2 Graduation data, Central European University
Program/Stream:

Student:

The Institutional Research Office at CEU collects information on student satisfaction with CEU programs and services as well as on career plans of CEU graduates. This information will be used to improve the quality of education, the scope and quality of resources and services that CEU offers to its students. The information you provide will be kept confidential and reported only in aggregate form. It takes approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey.

20204

1. Please evaluate your CEU academic program — Excellent

2. If you had a chance to do it over again, would you choose to complete your program at CEU? — Yes

2A. Please provide reasons WHY you would or would not

3. Would you recommend CEU to a friend? — Yes

3A. Please provide reasons WHY you would or would not

4. Please evaluate the following aspects of your academic program.

Quality of your graduate educational experience	Excellent
The academic climate at the university	Excellent
The intellectual climate in your department	Excellent
Coherence of your academic program	Excellent
The extent to which your academic program prepared you for your professional career goals	Good
The extent to which your academic program prepared you for further graduate studies	Excellent
The quality of courses	Excellent
Advising by your thesis supervisor	Excellent
Faculty availability and helpfulness	Excellent
The choice of specializations/streams/sub-fields	Good
The extent to which your academic program offered cross-disciplinary opportunities (e.g. cross-listed and	Good

joint courses, joint supervision by faculty from
different units, etc.)

5A. Please indicate how **<u>satisfied</u>** you were with the following resources.

CEU online orientation	Very satisfied
Pre-Session	Very satisfied
Zero Week	Not applicable/Not used
Departmental website	Very satisfied
University website	Very satisfied
Student handbook	Somewhat Satisfied
CEU computer network	Very satisfied
Computer Labs/Equipment/Software	Very satisfied

5B. Please indicate how **<u>important</u>** the following services were for you.

CEU online orientation	Very Important
Pre-Session	Somewhat Important
Zero Week	???
Departmental website	???
University website	???
Student handbook	???
CEU computer network	???
Computer Labs/Equipment/Software	???

5C. Please indicate how **<u>satisfied</u>** you were with the following academic resources.

CEU Library book and article collection	???
CEU Library electronic resources	???
Open Society Archives	???
Research Centers/Groups	???

5D. Please indicate how **<u>important</u>** the following academic services were for you.

CEU Library book and article collection	???
CEU Library electronic resources	???
Open Society Archives	???
Research Centers/Groups	???

5E. Which of the above-mentioned resources (see
Question 5) provided the best support for your
studies. In what way?

5F. Which of the above-mentioned resources (see Question 5) need improvement. In what way?

6A. Please indicate how **satisfied** you were with the following services.

Admission process	???
Assistance upon arrival	???
Student Life Support	???
CEU Residence Center	???
Course registration	???
Academic Counseling	???
Computer services	???
Library services	???
Academic Writing Center	???
Center for Teaching and Learning	???
Career Services	???
Advising on further graduate studies	???
Medical services	???
Psychological Counseling	???
Catering services - Main Campus	???
Catering services - Student Bar	???
Catering services - Residence Center	???

6B. Please indicate how **important** the following services were for you.

Admission process	???
Assistance upon arrival	???
Student Life Support	???
CEU Residence Center	???
Course registration	???
Academic Counseling	???
Computer services	???
Library services	???
Academic Writing Center	???
Center for Teaching and Learning	???
Career Services	???

Advising on further graduate studies | ??? ▼ |

Medical services | ??? ▼ |

Psychological Counseling | ??? ▼ |

Catering services - Main Campus | ??? ▼ |

Catering services - Student Bar | ??? ▼ |

Catering services - Residence Center | ??? ▼ |

7. How would you improve education at CEU? Please share your ideas with us in the space below.

8. How would you rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of community life at CEU?

Student programs, activities and events (e.g. receptions, film screenings, concerts, trips) | ??? ▼ |

Student clubs and organizations | ??? ▼ |

Student Union Assembly | ??? ▼ |

Community building tools (e.g. intranet, bulletin boards, public events) | ??? ▼ |

9. To what extent has CEU contributed to your personal and/or professional development in the following areas?

Deep knowledge of a single discipline | ??? ▼ |

Ability to carry out research and produce new knowledge | ??? ▼ |

Publishing in academic/professional journals or books | ??? ▼ |

Teaching skills and expertize | ??? ▼ |

Ability to integrate knowledge from several different disciplines | ??? ▼ |

Ability to present logical, rigorous, factual and scientifically grounded arguments | ??? ▼ |

Critical self-reflection | ??? ▼ |

Broad understanding of contemporary social problems | ??? ▼ |

Locating, collecting and processing work-related information | ??? ▼ |

Written communication skills | ??? ▼ |

Oral communication skills | ??? ▼ |

Acquiring new skills and knowledge on your own | ??? ▼ |

Functioning effectively as a team member | ??? ▼ |

Leadership and management skills | ??? ▼ |

Formulating creative/original ideas and solutions   [??? ▼]

Appreciating and advancing the values of open
societies and free and open critical inquiry   [??? ▼]

Integrating an international dimension into
professional activities   [??? ▼]

Adapting to different cultural environments   [??? ▼]

Command of English for academic and professional
purposes   [??? ▼]

10. What resources at CEU did you use in your JOB SEARCH? If you did not or are not searching for a job, please select 'N/A' for each of the following.

CEU Alumni Relations and Career Services   [N/A ▼]

                                              [N/A ▼]
Other CEU offices   If Yes, please specify:
                                              [   ]

CEU Career Fair   [N/A ▼]

CEU NGO Fair   [N/A ▼]

CEU faculty   [N/A ▼]

CEU staff   [N/A ▼]

                                              [N/A ▼]
Other   If Yes, please specify:
                                              [   ]

11. Was CEU your primary source of information
during your job search?   [??? ▼]

12. What resources at CEU did you use in your search for further GRADUATE EDUCATION? If you did not or are not applying to graduate schools, please select 'N/A for each of the following.

                                              [N/A ▼]
Other CEU offices   If Yes, please specify:
                                              [   ]

CEU faculty   [N/A ▼]

CEU staff   [N/A ▼]

                                              [N/A ▼]
Other   If Yes, please specify:
                                              [   ]

13. CEU Residence and Conference Center (Kerepesi)

13A. During our studies at CEU, did you live in the
CEU Residence and Conference Center (Kerepesi)?   [??? ▼]

13B. If you had been given the option of living in the
CEU Residence Center or finding your own
accommodations, which would you have chosen?   [??? ▼]

14. How satisfied were you with the following aspects of thesis supervision?

Supervisor's help in completing your prospectus   [??? ▼]

Supervisor's help in writing your dissertation   [??? ▼]

Supervisor's help with your dissertation research   [??? ▼]

Supervisor's help in networking   [??? ▼]

Supervisor's help in getting a job   [??? ▼]

How important were the following aspects of thesis supervision for you?

Supervisor's help in completing your prospectus   [??? ▼]

Supervisor's help in writing your dissertation   [??? ▼]

Supervisor's help with your dissertation research   [??? ▼]

Supervisor's help in networking   [??? ▼]

Supervisor's help in getting a job   [??? ▼]

15. Were you involved in any CEU-based research projects during the course of your doctoral studies?   [??? ▼]

Were any of these projects connected to your department?   [??? ▼]

16. Have you published any conference papers, journal articles, book chapters or books during your doctoral studies?

Individually   [??? ▼]

With other graduate students   [??? ▼]

With my supervisor   [??? ▼]

With (an)other CEU professor(s) (but not with my supervisor)   [??? ▼]

With a professor not from CEU   [??? ▼]

17. How many articles/book chapters/books did you publish in the course of your Ph.D. studies at CEU?   [   ]

18. How many conference presentations did you have during your doctoral program?   [   ]

19. Please indicate how satisfied you were with the following grants for Ph.D. students at CEU:

Research grants   [??? ▼]

Travel grants   [??? ▼]

Teaching grants   [??? ▼]

Doctoral Research Support Grant   [??? ▼]

20. Please indicate how satisfied you were with the following professional development programs:

Global Teaching Fellowship Program   [??? ▼]

Doctoral Internship Program

| ??? ▼ |

Professional Skills Development Program

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| Submit exit survey |

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