2023 European Quality Assurance Forum

Internationalisation in a changing world.
New trends and challenges for QA

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Myfanwy is Head of Quality Enhancement at Bangor University and is a part time Teaching and Research academic within the School of History, Philosophy and Social Sciences, where she is lead supervisor on three doctoral projects related to public policy. She also leads two research streams on professional identity among academics and student engagement, including exploring social belonging among international students, underrepresented groups and "traditional" UK students.

Myfanwy has championed an enhancement approach to quality assurance of international provision including embedding staff development in partnerships plans and the development of a "global classroom". Myfanwy was awarded a Principal Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy in 2020 for her work in international partnerships, she sits on the Executive Board of the Council for Validating Universities and is a QAA TNE reviewer.

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Dr Jasur Salikhov, is an Associate Professor of Economics at Tashkent State University of Economics (TSUE). From 2014-2023 he was Rector of Management Development Institute of Singapore in Tashkent (MDIST). Under his leadership the institution tripled its student body while also becoming the first Uzbek University to achieve ISO level quality certification in 2016. During his tenure, he introduced a broad range of new programmes, guided a major campus expansion and collaborated with Myfanwy Davies on a wholesale QA partnership review.
Jasur has 15 years of administration experience in higher education including as Deputy Rector at the University of Westminster in Tashkent. He initially pursued a twin-track career in international banking and academia and is a fellow of the Japan Foundation. He was previously a Chevening Scholar and a research fellow at Oxford University and Economics and a faculty member at the University of Tokyo.

Proposal

Title: Developing a sustainable model for quality in internationalization in the context of rapid change

Abstract: Internationalization has enormous potential to enrich learning and to create vibrant and productive academic communities. However, across the EU but in the UK in particular, the discourse has emphasised the economic benefits of internationalization to the detriment of realising the potential of internationalization as a driver for quality, innovation and collaboration.

This presentation by a Head of Quality at the first Welsh University to internationalize and a former Rector at an International University in Tashkent working with several European partners, will share best practice in terms of building robust and scalable quality assurance processes that drive enhancement. Using the Uzbek context as an example of policy-driven expansion in HE and the changing role of international partners, it will also consider how well-designed Quality Assurance can create opportunities for enhancement for both partner institutions.

Using a range of real-life examples, research and best practice, we will demonstrate how:

- Quality Assurance scrutiny can be decentralised so that partners have an equal voice to the home institution
- Quality Assurance processes can promote staff engagement and development
- Global classrooms can be established through Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) initiatives
- Activities such as student conferences can be used to foster a sense of belonging and promote global citizenship
- Developing research-based learning through collaboration

We will close by reflecting on developing a new model for quality in internationalization that continues to deliver value in the context of rapid expansion of HE in new transnational learning hubs and through government-driven growth in former host countries.

Welcome to our presentation, which aims to do five things. We will set out the broad context in which international partnerships operate, some established risks. We will describe the role of international partnerships in Uzbekistan and steps the Uzbek government is taking to strengthen quality, standards and enhancement across HE. We then move to present two in depth case studies that demonstrate aspects of good practice in moving to an approach that enables shared learning and creativity in Wales and Scotland. We will outline good practice from the rest of the UK in terms of delivering value in partnerships. We will close by considering how we might extend our quality frameworks for large scale international teaching partnerships to reflect principles of enhancement and bidirectional learning.

Many of us are in this room because we know internationalization has enormous potential to enrich students' learning and to create vibrant and productive academic communities for staff and students. It can serve as a platform to share best practice, meet workforce and innovation needs, and develop synergies in research. [1] Reflecting those benefits since 2010, the Council of Europe has urged members to develop "an international culture" through student mobility, shared projects and knowledge exchange. [2]

However, in many countries an increased reliance on tuition fees from international students and income from franchising or branch campuses, creates an incentive to regard international education as a commodity.[3] Turning to the UK, the discourse around monetising international links in the UK has become pronounced as real-terms funding for UK students has declined. Tuition fees from non-EU students now make up 20% of total income across UK institutions a trend, exacerbated by the loss of EU students following Brexit. [4] The UK government's current International Education Strategy aims to "increase educational exports to £35 billion per year" (from £20 Billion in 2016) and to increase the numbers of international students studying in the UK to 600, 000 per year (from 460,00 in 2017/18) both by 2030. [5] It is noteworthy that this strategy is shared between the Ministry of Education and the Department for International Trade.

While European and particularly UK institutions may see internationalisation as a means to balance the books, countries in the Global South use international collaborations to drive national development. For Uzbekistan, the establishment of international partnerships and branch campuses aims to both to:

"*increase to enhance the higher education coverage and to improve the quality of teaching in higher education*". [6]

At its independence, Uzbekistan had a 9% participation rate in HE which increased to only 11 % by 2016. However, it has embraced HE expansion since 2020. The publication of a 10-year strategy to 2030, prioritized growth in participation to 50% by 2030 [6]. This target is on track to be met as participation had already increased 40% by 2022 [7]. The student population has quadrupled to a million. Alongside trebling the number of HEIs, in 2022, there were 31 TNE ventures operating in Uzbekistan. [7]

Alongside growth, the Government of Uzbekistan has focused on capacity building, quality and quality monitoring. The strategy also introduces a target of 10 Uzbek HEIs to rank in the top 1000 worldwide and two leading national universities to rank in top 500. Key issues identified were the development of a wider cohort of qualified faculty, teaching higher level skills such as analytic thinking, developing a research infrastructure and aligning research with regional needs [6]. International benchmarking of teaching and assessment, employer and student involvement in curriculum design and supporting the production of high-quality teaching materials by Uzbek faculty were also prioritised. [6]

An indication of the Government's priorities is the naming of the current year as "Year of Human Care and Quality Education". Structural reforms during 2023 have created a Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovations, which has taken on responsibility for overseeing HEI accreditation through the use of student outcomes data [8]. These data will include student outcomes and the results of stakeholder and student surveys. Since 2024, requirements for accreditation, re-accreditation and quality conforming exercises will depend on the University's position in the rankings.[8]

The Uzbek Government's priorities for Quality Assurance align well with international norms. They reflect key aspects of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education for course design in four main ways: benchmarking content to external reference points, student and stakeholder involvement, aligning the level of teaching to internationally recognised standards and ensuring staff are appropriately supported through continual professional development. [9] More broadly the Uzbek Governments' plans reflect the core expectations of the UK Quality Code in relation to partnerships, these being: ensuring that the *"standards of courses meets the requirements of relevant national qualification*

frameworks" and that *"the courses are well-designed and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed*, and that *students are supported to succeed and benefit from their education".* [10] Based on the information available, plans for developing QA oversight in Uzbekistan also reflect the full range of ESG standards [11].

However, given the salience of financial motivations for international partnerships and in the cases of Uzbekistan, the drive for growth as well as quality, these commitments to quality may come under particular strains. Teaching internationally on a large scale tends to lead to standardising teaching to core content and assessments established in the home campus for popular courses [12]. Where only the home country context, expertise and practices are understood as being of value, these developments may also have a neo-colonial effect [13]. This will be exacerbated where in-country staff do not have a strong voice in decision-making. Alongside the scaling up of international activity we can also trace the deployment of a deficit model, the perception that everything relating to the partner is a problem to be solved. This is illustrated by a review of research on international higher education in leading journal which that internationalisation was discussed almost entirely in terms of a challenge to good pedagogy [14].

Takes us on to part two of our presentation, in which we will present in depth case studies from Wales and Scotland and some best practice from the rest of the UK.

Universities in Scotland and Wales are regulated through an enhancement approach, which encompasses compliance with the quality standards set out in the UK Quality Code and also commits to enhancement defined as "taking deliberate steps to improve the effectiveness of the student learning experience" [14, 15]. Compliance with the full UK Quality code and enhancement form a continuum. Partnership with students in delivering teaching and enhancement and a commitment to evaluate and report on improvements and interventions is a key principle in each case.

My University, Bangor has been involved in a long-standing partnership with the Management Development Institute of Singapore in Tashkent. The partnership initially involved MDIS in Singapore providing course materials and questions alongside marking and feedback so Tashkent staff were involved only in teaching. Additionally due to necessity of safeguarding transparency, Tashkent staff would only see examination questions on the morning the examination was set.

External examiners' reports, following the Summer Examination Boards for 2016/17, had identified exceptionally high failure rates for some modules. As admissions standards were good, this raised concerns regarding meeting two aspects of the UK Quality Code these being that: *the courses are well-designed and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed*, and that *students are supported to succeed and benefit from their education.*

We examined student performance across modules and types of assessment within modules and used expert advice to examine teaching materials. We discussed how teaching and assessment had been provided with MDIST staff and held focus groups with students. Students voiced concerns about the extent to which assessment reflected the teaching that had been provided and quality and relevance of feedback and the clarity of the marking process and allocation of marks. Exacerbating these risks was the lack of direct communication between lecturers in Uzbekistan and those preparing material, assessment and marking in Singapore.

We identified ways to increase purposeful communication between staff groups including introducing a vetting form so that staff in Tashkent confirmed that the content to be examined had been taught. We also introduced questions on assessment quality, course organisation and feedback

into the consumer satisfaction survey used at Tashkent. At this early point we received an affirmation of the approach as part of our QAA institutional approval process.

During the second year of the intervention, when we became aware of the Uzbek Government target to treble the cohort taught to around 1,500, we began to plan exam board systems to identify outliers and to promote collective responses to teaching issues. We introduced comparative data on past cohort performance and performance on each element of assessment. We used internal boards to examine any high failure rate modules with markers and lecturers in the same virtual room.

During the third year, we focused on promoting staff development across the partner's sites in Singapore and Tashkent. A decision was made to move to a franchise partnership with material and assessment supplied from Bangor. To develop a self-reflexive practice, we introduced an expectation that staff in all three parts of the partnership and student representatives develop the annual review for the next year of teaching and agree on responsibilities for delivering it. Reflecting the Uzbek government's own concerns, in 2019 external examiners questioned the extent to which students were being taught and assessed in way that promoted critical and analytical thinking. We ran a series of workshops with staff culminating in an External Examiner-led event in Tashkent where examples of problem-solving assignments and those testing analytical skills were shared by UK and Tashkent staff. At this juncture we planned a new Tourism degree where all seminar content was developed by guidance of a Tashkent-based Head of Department.

These changes contributed to improved outcomes for students as reflected in an increase in good degrees for the programmes over the first three years. During year 4, the second Covid year, we continued with the modified processes and ways of working. We were not immune to poor practice ourselves and there were some operational difficulties in introducing the franchise. The student cohort expanded, and staff base grew and changed. In 2021 I commissioned an external expert to write a report on assessment in the partnership. She concluded that: *although impressive progress has been made in establishing collaborative processes and systemic ways of working there is still progress to be made to ensure a shared understanding of Quality Assurance" (Evans, 2021).*

It was at this point that we started to reflect on the steps our intervention has taken, from developing processes to address risks, to using process to change ways of working and communicating and valuing some staff which led to a better alignment of our institutional cultures. Only having got to that point did we begin to learn together and unlock the creative and intellectual potential of the partnership. We began to think in terms of a triangle of interventions leading to better alignment, but the conclusion of the report, made us realise that we had not begun with a shared QA framework. In Wales and Uzbekistan, we were in the process of developing new frameworks, but it is also fair to say that the partnership had never been designed around QA concerns.

Further steps were taken, and student performance in Tashkent is now broadly equivalent to that of our home campus, but we wonder how much faster we could have arrived at that point if we had started with an informed discussion about quality and what each partner needed to achieve.

That brings to the second example, which is around developing common decision-making structures that meet the requirements of several Quality systems.

Heriot Watt University is a global institution, with three campuses in Scotland and one in each of Dubai and Malaysia. There is a single, global Quality Office which encompasses assurance, accreditation and enhancement and is led by Dr Maggie King, to whom I am indebted for the content reported here.

Because Herriot Watt derives its authority to award degrees from the Scottish Govt system, all activity needs to take place as part of an enhancement approach. QAA Scotland's Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) ELIR considers the effectiveness of the University's approach to managing collaborative provision including arrangements for securing academic standards and enhancing the student learning experience [15] . At the same time, Heriot Watt's partnership programmes needs to satisfy in-country accreditation, the University chooses to meet the requirements of the QAA translational review scheme and in some cases, it needs to comply with the requirements of Professional, Regulatory and Statutory Bodies (PSRBs).

This is managed through a single global quality framework, which is characterised by 2 key aspects: ensuring identical academic standards and supporting a diversity of learning experiences. In practice this means the programmes and modules have the same learning outcomes irrespective of their location or the mode of delivery, but the student learning experience will vary to meet the needs of different cohorts, including understanding home country contexts and preparing for employability. It also allows for diversity in approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. The enhancement led approach encourages creativity in teaching and learning approaches that best support students.

Managing the diversity is achieved through annual and periodic review as well as core policies, particularly in relation to assessment and moderation. Heriot Watt has global codes of practice which reflect the entirety of the UK Quality Code and apply equally in any location.

What is more unusual is that the University also has in place global academic management structures for learning and teaching, whereby the institution-level committees and leadership roles are mirrored at local levels, with equal representation from all campuses.

In terms of evidencing success, the process was commended in the University's most recent ELIR, national quality review:

The University has a mature and effective institutional quality framework which is well-understood by staff across all campuses and is supported by the use of clear and accessible documentation. (ELIR, 2020)

Similarly the 2022 accreditation report of the CAA in Dubai commends, the academic quality and standards that are "applied globally" and "the management of quality assurance, based on Scottish standards and the structures in place to engage students and staff as co-creators of their environment" (CAA, 2022).

This model enables the requirements of multiple systems to be met and provides latitude for evidence-based enhancements at each teaching location. It does that by rejecting the hub and spoke model whereby content and decisions come from the historic home institution.

While there is no national framework that supports enhancement in England and some uncertainty on the direction that QA regulation may take, there is good and indeed excellent practice in internationalizing at home and in adding value through shared learning. Internationalization at home, a pillar of European Higher Education policy since along with mobility and cooperation and partnership since 2013 [17].

Collaborative Online International Learning or COIL is a learning and teaching approach that uses internet-based tools to connect students and staff from universities in different countries. It has been welcomed as a means to extend student mobility beyond a relatively small elite [18] . Academics work together to create and deliver shared programmes, and students work on shared collaborative projects, which are often comparative in nature, with shared learning outcomes. The

University of Coventry for example provides support for planning COIL and reports that in 2022/3, its students undertook 92 projects with 91 institutions from, 41 countries. These ranged across subject fields, platforms and involved different kinds of collaboration. In some cases, groups of students have specific roles, as consultants for the other groups and in others, all contribute on an equal basis.

Returning to Uzbek problem of how to develop excellent education at scale with international partners, there are examples where UK universities are directly involved in academic staff CPD in a transnational context. The University of Greenwich has offered offers its PGCE (HE)the entry qualification to university teaching in partnership with the University of Modern Science and Arts in Cairo since 2020. This is the first known center in middle east to run such a programme, cohorts have already doubled, with previous cohorts now tutoring existing students. It has also received a ministerial visit.

But perhaps the full value of working with international teaching partnerships can only be realised fully where academics are involved in the most prestigious activity - that of research. There is evidence that international collaboration associates with higher citation rates [19, 20] . Additionally, many national research ranking exercises such as the UK's REF, incentivise international work as higher ratings reflect international and global relevance.

International teaching partnerships can (and should) bring benefit to teaching and learning, student experience, research and diversity. Countries in the Global South such as Uzbekistan use internationalisation to address skills deficits and to develop but they must see their quality needs met and their capacity built. Our own intervention progressed through several stages before arriving at real bidirectional learning that drove a new curriculum and a new area for us. The second case study shows how decentralised structures and global QA standards can release creativity and would have helped us design out QA risk in the first place.

We have provided examples of adding value to show what can be achieved in terms of shared learning.

Financial drivers for partnerships are very evident and indeed are promoted by the UkUK Government. These are likely to lead to homogenous provision and cost-cutting. As other TNE hubs emerge across Asia,[21] institutions across the EU need to be guided to design their partnerships well. Clear national QA and QE frameworks help us design sustainable partnerships. Transnational frameworks such as the ESG guide us better still. But we need to be ambitious. To remain relevant, we should include expectations around added value and in large-scale partnerships, commitments to bilateral learning, global QA parity and devolved decision making.

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