

Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA)

Works accomplished by HERQA

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I) Accomplishment of HERQA

Introduction

This is the report on some of the works HERQA has accomplished in the current fiscal year. It is submitted to the NPT coordinating office, MOE and the World Bank to incorporate the planned activities of the forthcoming year and. It has also additional purpose of updating the NPT and World Bank on what has been undertaken and justifies the requested assistances in light of the responsibilities of the agency as they have supplementary contribution to consolidate the initiated and started activities of the agency. Thus the activity plan has two parts: the first part deals with the accomplishment of the agency and the second part deals with the activities to be undertaken in the forthcoming year.

Staff Recruitment

Currently HERQA has four experts, senior VSO advisor and four shared support staffs with Higher Education Strategic Center (HESC). The existing staff of the agency has never enabled the agency to discharge its mandates as anticipated. Hence, recruitment of adequate staff for the core activities and administration is a matter of urgency for the effective operation of HERQA. The number of staff required is dependent on the volume and depth of the work of HERQA and need to be assessed in light of the responsibilities entrusted to HERQA. The organizational structure for the two organizations is under review to assess the compatibility of the existing manpower and the volume and depth of different tasks the agency would like to accomplish. Until recently the agency is working with very limited staff, but has accomplished a lot as a result of very few committed core staff. This should not proceed as it has been done this year as the core staff particularly the Director should not shoulder a number of responsibilities as he has to lead the agency in a very strategic direction. It is therefore advisable to look into other means that would be instrumental to discharge its responsibilities. One option would be the support of the World Bank that would fill some gaps in terms of recruitment of consultants in the areas identified below. It is the agency's belief that World Bank will consider these requests and facilitate the recruitment of competent professionals as soon as possible.

Internal Quality Audit

Staff from HERQA and experts from the Netherlands conducted a joint pilot internal quality audit at Adama University, a public higher education institution in December 2005. Similar piloting work was undertaken during March 27-April 1, 2006 at Unity University College, a private higher education institution. It was planned that the two HEIs would later present their reports on internal quality audit to other higher education institutions at the conference, which takes place at the end of June 2006. The plan was to gather feedbacks and further enrich the internal quality audit protocol, which both HERQA and HEIs use for quality audit in the forthcoming academic year. This conference was held as scheduled where the reflection and experiences of the above two institutions were presented in June 7 & 8 2006. Participants from all public universities,

43 degree awarding private higher education institutions, professional associations, Regional Bureau of Education and government and nongovernmental organizations attained. Enormous experiences were obtained for the further enrichment of the quality audit protocol. The self assessment reports were open, transparent and realistic where weakness and strengths of the two institutions were brought for discussion and deliberation. It also showed that the intuitional audit protocol produced is an important mirror for the institutions to look their real image and shoe them the circumstance in which they operate. This protocol is also believed that it would be an instrument to show their weakness and means for improvement. Similar piloting works have also been undertaken in the then Debub University and St. Mary's College.

External Quality Audit

The pre-requisite for external quality audit is the submission of internal quality assessment report by the institutions to the HERQA. This is the common procedure followed by all quality agencies globally which HERQA should definitely follow. HERQA studies the internal quality reports of the institutions and undertakes external quality audit on the basis of set and agreed criteria and submit its report to the concerned bodies for further action. This calls for adequate preparation from all HEIs on built-in internal quality care system. Unfortunately most HEIs seem not to have adequate preparations on quality care as Academic Development Resource Centers (ADRCs) are at different operational and development stages. HERQA will not do any external quality audit unless quality care units are organized and made functional by HEIs. The contents of the protocols for internal and external quality audits were presented, discussed, approved by participants coming from public and private higher institutions and professional associations in December 2005 where HERQA cleared the ground and created mutual understanding among public and private higher education intuitions on the need of quality audit. A detailed plan of action is prepared to conduct quality audit as of September 2006. Reports will be prepared on the conducted external quality audits to MoE.

Accreditation

The agency undertakes pre-accreditation and accreditation visits as per the requests of private higher education institutions (PHEIs). The services rendered to PHEIs so far have been presented to the board. HERQA planned to provide accreditation services to 12 PHEIs and pre-accreditation services to about 20 PHEIs until the end of June 2007. Due to the high number of applications, most of the experts' time is devoted in the provision of pre-accreditation and accreditation services. HERQA expressed its concerns on the current pre-accreditation and accreditation practices and a concept paper was produced for discussion. It was deliberated among participants in the kick off workshop organized by the agency held on 6 - 7th December 2006. Feedbacks are gathered from different institutions' representatives and it is anticipated that the outcomes would be presented to the board for appropriate action getting additional information and facts from the experiences of other countries.

Guidelines for graduate program accreditation were also drafted by HERQA staff and distributed to HEIs where feedback collected and incorporated. The guidelines developed were presented in the December 2005 workshop and June 2006 conference for further deliberation by all participants. It is planned to be submitted to the board for endorsement and action.

MIS/communication

The Management and Information System unit is planning to develop information system. Standard questionnaires have been prepared to collect pertinent qualitative and quantitative data to decide on the nature of information management system that meets the agency's and its stakeholders' desires and requirements. The collected data will then be critically analyzed to develop information management system for the agency. The work entails different phases. Shortly there will be enormous amount of incoming documents on quality audit and accreditation which need handy soft wares to ease the workload of the staff and add efficiency. Although accreditation manuals, list of accredited programs, institutions and the duration of the accreditation award provided, proceedings of the workshops and many other relevant documents are put in the web (<http://www.higher.edu.et/>) of the agency, there are a lot to do in this area.

Training and conferences

Exposure of staff to the work of highly experienced quality assurance agencies has paramount importance. The participation of staff of the agency in workshops and conferences on quality assurance and accreditation processes enable them to gain more direct experience. HERQA has planned to participate in pertinent international conference on quality assurance in higher education, which will take place in France in June 2006. The agency appreciates the supports it received from the MOE and the World Bank regarding this issue.

Strategic Plan of HERQA

The five-year strategic plan of the agency has been prepared and submitted to the board members for approval. The main goal of the strategic planning is to develop a course of action for HERQA, specifying the resources required and the development that must occur at each level. It should specify the general direction of HERQA, how HERQA will tackle each aspect of its particular mission and how each element of HERQA will contribute to its overall mission, vision, goals and objectives.