

Quality in Education, Training and Lifelong Learning: The Path for Excellence Through ISO 10015

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Abstract

High quality education can positively influence labour factor conditions of a country's economic development. The availability of a highly skilled labour force is a factor contributing substantially to national economic development. Most countries consider investment in education as being of strategic importance to enhance national competitiveness and to increase opportunities to attract foreign direct investment.¹

Analyses of factors ensuring competitiveness and prosperity of leading European and North American regions have shown a consistent pattern. Summarising the results of a cross-regional survey covering 20 regions in Europe and North America, Koellreuter² identified 50 factors, which have an influence on a region's economic advantage. The most decisive factors in ranking order (1 being most important) are a) Availability of highly skilled labour (1); b) Price/performance of highly skilled labour (2); c) Price/performance of skilled labour (5); Availability of skilled labour (6).

Making education fit a country's current and future needs in the fields of economic and social development is crucial for the country's ability to adapt to the continuous changes of the world's economy. Adequate educational systems are needed to ensure the availability of a skilled and highly skilled labour force without which economic and social development will be jeopardized and local and foreign investment discouraged.

Higher enrolment of higher education coupled with greater diversity of the educational sector have triggered governmental concerns about quality. Informal approach to quality assurance, suitable in the past with only a few institutions and relatively small enrolment, are now seen as insufficient for a larger system of higher education.³ This shift to formal systems of quality assurance is one of the most significant trends affecting higher education over the last decades. Emergence of knowledge society and the commercialisation of the educational services have further strengthened the sense of urgency.

Accreditation, standard setting, self-study, external review and public ranking are some of the broadly accepted approaches to evaluate and ensure quality of higher education. Nevertheless, debates continue over the role and proper form of evaluation and quality assurance for higher education. There is an increasing recognition that these widely accepted approaches focus primarily on the “qualification” of the educational institutions to offer programmes and to grant degrees, in addition to their intake “capacity”. In contrast, these quality assurance instruments have paid much less attention to the learning processes and the learning outcome of higher education.

There also exists the perception that current quality evaluation systems are often designed from the perspective of the regulatory authority and their needs. Diverse forms of evaluation are meant to provide feedback to the authorities for policy evaluation and planning purpose. These evaluation systems tend to be driven by the respective authorities who use resource allocation as leverage for control and improvement.

In a diversified higher education system, such evaluation instruments need to be supported by additional quality assurance tools such as ISO 10015 to ensure proper return on investment (resource utilisation and economic and social benefits) and consumer satisfaction (employability and social mobility). This additional battery of quality assurance instruments should have the following characteristics: independence, results based, process oriented, and self-regulatory.

Excellence in education is the fast lane of moving a country and its people up the development ladder. While accreditation ensures the minimum requirements of offering degree programmes or certified education, and while programme evaluation provides periodical overview of the performance of education institutions, neither addresses the employability of graduates in the labour market nor the actual learning outcomes. To achieve excellence in education, a more process oriented quality management instrument that ensures on-going involvement of employer organisations and society at large in the education process and focusing on the learning outcome is a necessary requisite.

¹ Michie, Jonathan (2002), “Foreign Direct Investment and Human Capital Enhancement in Developing Countries, Competition & Change”, 6, pp. 363-372.

² Christoph Koellreuter, “Increasing Globalisation: Challenge for the European Regions”, BAK International Benchmark Report, 1997, Basle.

³ El-Khawas, Depietro-Jurand & Holm-Nielson, 1998, Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Recent Progress; Challenges Ahead. Paper contributed by the World Bank at the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, October 5-9. Paris.

Speakers

Prof. Dr. Lichia Yiu, leading expert of education and training, has consulted governments, international organizations and enterprises on effectiveness and efficiency of education and training systems. She is the president of the Centre for Socio-Eco-Nomic Development based in Geneva, a leading R&D organisation in complex system change and transformational learning. She has designed and carried out major public administrative reforms in China, Slovenia, Russia and Vietnam and conducted training seminars on leadership development, organisational change and ISO 10015 in USA, Austria, France, Germany, Switzerland, China, Columbia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Brasill and consults governments and internatonal enterprises on training policy and human capital formation. She has published 7 books and 40 articles in different professional journals.

Mr. Tommie Johansson, has rich experience in various fields, which includes consultancy, national standards formulation as member of Swedish Standards Institute technical committee for quality management, on education as lecturer on quality management principles, Stellenboech University, South Africa, as Sweden's national expert in training and economics; on strategic competence management as advisor to Business Region Goteborg, Sweden and to globally reputed organizations.

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