



**Sub theme 3:  
Ensuring and Promoting  
Trust in a Globalized Context**



**Inclusion of International Reviewers  
in  
Institutional Reviews to Promote Trust  
in  
External Quality Assurance**



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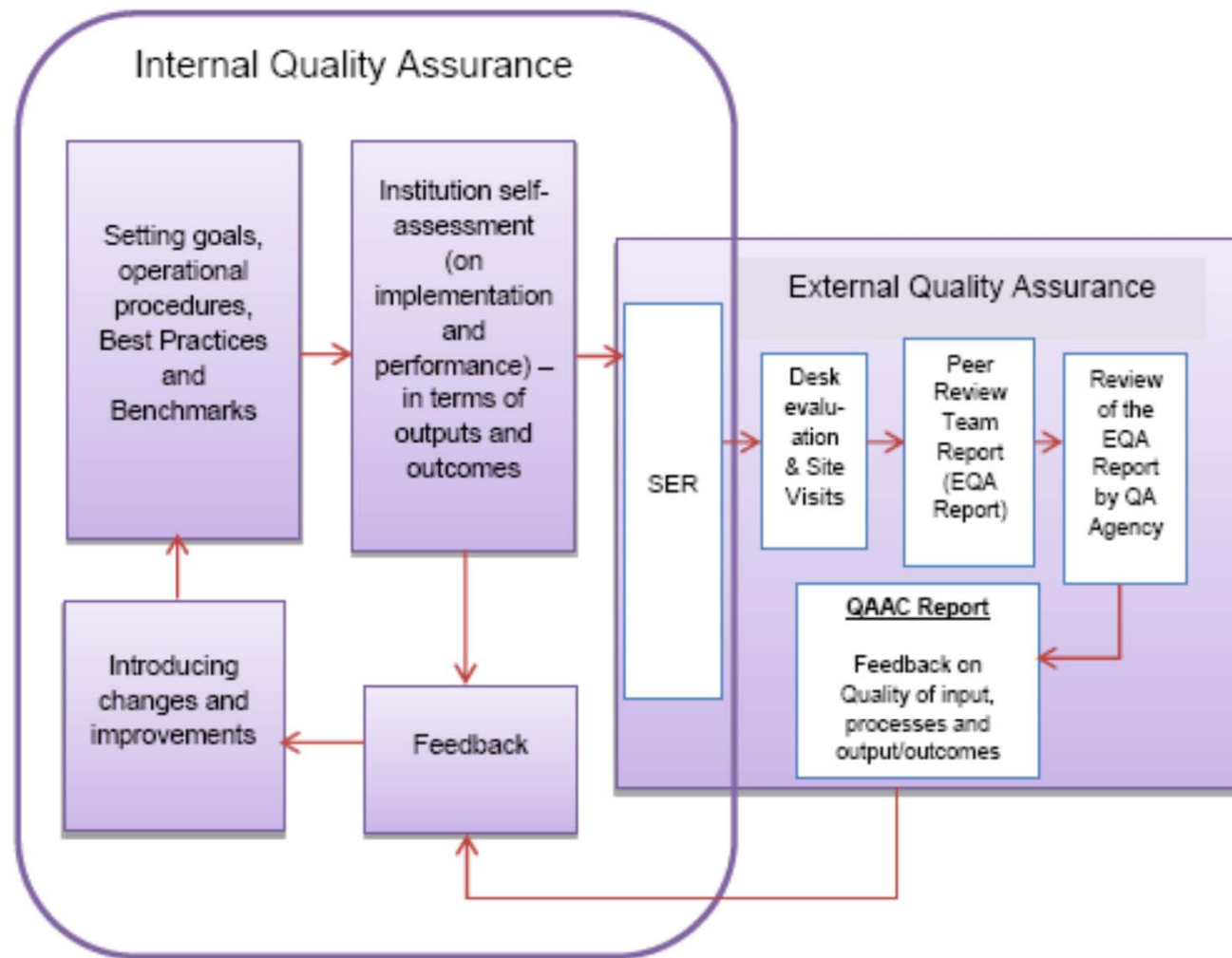
**Yunnan Higher Education Evaluation Center (YHEEC), China**

# Institutional Review (IR) in Sri Lanka

## Background of QA system in Sri Lanka

- One QA system operational for the Sri Lankan State Universities
- under the aegis of the Quality Assurance Council (QAC) of the University Grants Commission (UGC)
- an External Quality Assurance (EQA) system and the Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) system in each University
- work in tandem





**Figure 1 Functional link between the Internal Quality Assurance and the External Quality Assurance.**

# Summary of the First Cycle of IR

- Institutional reviews (IR) was initiated in 2006
- first cycle was completed with reviewer panels comprising totally of local reviewers
- a guideline manual for the reviewers which evaluated Universities on 8 criteria



## **II. New initiative in Second Cycle: Inclusion of International Reviewers**

### **Rationale:**

It is imperative that tertiary education provision and its quality assurance is an essential commodity to be ensured by any country that is aspiring to be in the global arena of higher education





- UGC- the apex body in providing higher education and maintaining standards through its QAC
- created a new dimension to the external quality assurance mechanism in its second cycle of IRs of Universities
- inclusion of an international reviewer to each reviewer panel



**INTERNATIONAL**

## **Objectives of this initiative**

- to promote trust through transparency
- enhance credibility and scope of the review
- be accountable to all stakeholders in higher education





- all local reviewers were professors and senior professors in the State University system
- had required credentials and experience to serve in the review panel
- QAC belief- inclusion of an international reviewer would heighten the trust of stakeholders in the IR which is conducted in a 6-year cycle.

in 2018,

- two international reviewers successfully participated in 2 review panels of the IR of two of the State Universities
- together with the local reviewers in the panels



# Methodology

- **All reviewers (local and international) provided with a self- evaluation report submitted by the University to be reviewed written by them according to specific guidelines**
- **All reviewers used the “Manual for Institutional Review of Universities and Higher Education Institutes in Sri Lanka”**
- **submitted an individual desk evaluation report on a template provided by the QAC for this purpose**
- **Proceeding to the respective sites**
- **evaluation was on 10 criteria**
- **site evaluation was conducted under the guidance of the review panel chairman**
- **the self- evaluation report submitted by the University on which the desk evaluation was done was validated by observing evidence provided by the University**
- **total site visit - six days**





**IR**

Institutional Review

# III. Advantages of Inclusion of International Reviewers



- Sri Lanka being a small island nation- academics serving as reviewers are known to each other well this initiative was hoped to eliminate even the smallest bias in judgments
- build sustainable stakeholder relationships while developing partnerships and working together in the important endeavor of providing higher education of acceptable international quality to students of diverse backgrounds and varied expectations



- the expertise and experience of the international reviewers would assist to conduct the review more objectively since they would be reviewing a system which was less known to them but one where they were yet able to practice the fundamental principles of quality assurance

**INTERNATIONAL**  
Reviewer



- the international reviewers (from China and Russia) could share their experiences as reviewers from countries where the QA mechanism has advanced to a stage higher than in Sri Lanka



# Documents

- provided the QAC, local reviewers and reviewed University to gain insight in to their views/comments on the types of documents that were expected to be shown
  - their appropriateness, and potential documents that could be provided for each criterion and the standards therein



# Stakeholder meetings

- review schedule included meetings with all potential stakeholders of the University and the visiting of University facilities which enabled it to serve as a higher education provider for the State
- - provide feedback on the adequacy of manner in which the meetings were conducted –in order to obtain the “real picture” of the situation of the myriad of aspects that contribute to a total educational experience of students



# Facilities

- observation of facilities for teaching/learning/assessment- gave them opportunity to express their view on possible interventions that could be made to “modernize” learner and outcome based education with new technology



# QA mechanisms in other countries

- provide the QAC, local reviewers and the reviewed University the opportunity to gain valuable insight regarding QA mechanisms in other countries

this opportunity to the

- administrative hierarchy
- academics
- support staff
- alumni
- industry partners
- students –the primary beneficiaries of QA reviews



# Exchange of knowledge

provided exchange of knowledge regarding

- international benchmarks
- qualification frameworks
- codes of practices
- constructive mechanisms for the function of internal quality assurance units of Universities



# Recommendations

- Effective communication of the review team members
- eventful site-visit program
- an impressive list of documents provided by the University
- strong internal quality system which is incorporated via IQAUs and IQACs at each faculty of the University were worthwhile attributes noted by the international reviewers which allowed to carry out a profound review
- formulate a list of recommendations
- helpful for the further enhancement of the University and strengthen its reputation locally and abroad





# IV. Challenges of International Reviewers



# Context and Culture Specificity

- Stakeholder engagement like many other aspects of education and quality assurance is context and culture specific



# Reviewer Profile

- extreme care had to be exercised in the selection of international reviewers who had to be experts in evaluation of Universities/Institutes
- appreciated the diversity of students and staff and respected the values and norms of the culture and country at large
- profile had to be made available to the university to be reviewed in order to maintain transparency and request their acceptance
- cost of having institutional reviewers is significant and has to be justifiable



# Survey

conducted with

- local reviewers
- international reviewers
- reviewed Universities of this review cycle



# Beneficial aspects of inclusion of international reviewers

- University education must have universal standards. If the Institutional review (IR) committee comprises only local members no comparison could be done with other universities in the world
- Foreign members invited for the IR review panels are conversant with quality assurance processes of their own country. The feedback for the improvement of quality assurance process itself and best practices are also important for the improvement of the quality



- Future trends in higher education are dynamic and recommendations for new directions for development of programs or orientation of existing programs are important to improve competitiveness of our programs.

Therefore, external feedback from foreign expertise is gainful.

- Experienced international reviewers help to build the confidence in the evaluation team by the university been evaluated. They lack any personal prejudice and hence they are most welcome by the University being reviewed

**FUTURE TRENDS**

- It also blends the international level quality expectation in to local reviews and improves the quality of local reviewers by -  
sharing international expectations with respect to local standards
- Since the international reviewers do not know the local context adequately they would be able to provide input in comparison with good universities overseas





# Aspects of concern to be considered in future

- When the team comprises 5 local to 1 international-possibility that the opinions of the visitor is not well heard, especially since a majority of the team experienced persons
- arrival of the international reviewers very close to the site visit and driven straight to the University under review, gives them minimal time and inadequate information to understand the local context

**aspects**

- The views of the visitor may be important to have in a reviewer training also. Hearing views from a couple of international expert reviewers would be useful
- If our standards are good, this will be a good medium of propaganda



**Reviewers**

- There should be discussions between local IR panel and the foreign expert before commencing the site visit process during the desk review time.

Otherwise, it makes them depend on what the other reviewers inform them and hence guided by them rather than they be able to guide the locals in situations where their expertise would be important

- The persons should be well aware of the system operative in Sri Lanka and possess adequate experience in relation to international reviews.

- However, it is very important to select and appoint experienced and flexible reviewers, who would not try to impose or dominate



**Reviewers**

# V. Solutions and Way Forward

- The QAC would continue to include international reviewers in future IRs too considering the positive responses received from local reviewers and reviewed Universities
- QAC should maintain a database of such reviewers who are willing to and work in Sri Lanka at a reasonable honorarium



# VI. Conclusion

- In an era where student mobility in higher education is ever increasing and recognition of qualifications and benchmarks have to go global, the QAC sincerely believe that this initiative marked an important milestone in QA of higher education in Sri Lanka and that it would also be an incentive to other nations who have yet not embarked on internationalizing their external review process so that trust could be ensured and promoted in a globalized context

