

Progressing Institutional Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes

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Abstract : Globally, higher education institutions are responsible for the quality assurance and accreditation of their educational programmes (Courses). The primary purpose of these activities is to ensure that the educational standards of the governing higher education authority are met and the quality of the education provided to students is assured. Despite policies and frameworks being established in many countries, to improve the veracity and accountability of quality assurance and accreditation processes, there are reportedly still mistakes, gaps and deficiencies in these processes. An analysis of Australian universities' quality assurance and accreditation processes noted that significant improvements were needed in managing these processes and ensuring that review recommendations were implemented. It has also been suggested that the following principles are critical for higher education quality assurance and accreditation to be effective and sustainable: academic standards and performance outcomes must be defined, attainable and monitored; those involved in providing the higher education must assume responsibility for the associated quality assurance and accreditation; potential academic risks must be identified and management solutions developed; and the expectations of the public, governments and students should be considered and incorporated into Course enhancements. This phenomenological study, which was conducted in a Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health in an Australian university, sought to systematically and iteratively develop an effective quality assurance and accreditation process that integrated the evidence-based principles of success and promoted meaningful and sustainable change. Qualitative evaluative feedback was gathered, over a period of eleven months (January - November 2014), from faculty staff engaged in the quality assurance and accreditation of forty-eight undergraduate and postgraduate Courses. Reflexive analysis was used to analyse the data and inform ongoing modifications and developments to the assurance and accreditation process as well as the associated supporting resources. The study resulted in the development of a formal quality assurance and accreditation process together with a suite of targeted resources that were identified as critical for success. The research findings also provided some insights into the institutional enablers that were antecedents to successful quality assurance and accreditation processes as well as meaningful change in the educational practices of academics. While longitudinal data will be collected to further assess the value of the assurance and accreditation process on educational quality, early indicators are that there has been a change in the pedagogical perspectives and activities of academic staff and growing momentum to explore opportunities to further enhance and develop Courses. This presentation will explain the formal quality assurance and accreditation process as well as the component parts, which resulted from this study. The targeted resources that were developed will be described, the pertinent factors that contributed to the success of the process will be discussed and early indicators of sustainable academic change as well as suggestions for future research will be outlined.

Keywords : academic standards, quality assurance and accreditation, phenomenological study, process, resources

Conference Title : ICHE 2015 : International Conference on Higher Education

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : May 25-26, 2015