

Developing Subject-Specific Benchmarks as a Tool for Internal and External Quality Assurance: The Example of East Africa

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Inter-University Council
for East Africa

DAAD

Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst
German Academic Exchange Service

HRK German Rectors' Conference
The Voice of the Universities

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THE CONTEXT

Inter-University Council East Africa (IUCEA) whose main role and functions are to:

- a) Coordinate inter-university cooperation in East Africa;
- b) Facilitate the strategic development of member universities; and
- c) Promote internationally comparable higher education standards and systems for sustainable regional development.

Please note: In 2009 the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) enacted the IUCEA Act 2009, thus effectively integrating IUCEA into the EAC operational framework. Previously it was mainly a members club with no statutory requirements from the EAC

IUCEA/DAAD/HRK QA INITIATIVE CONCEPTION

In 2005, as partners, IUCEA and DAAD/HRK agreed on:

The need for a collaboration to introduce a regional quality assurance system for the Partner States of the East African Community (EAC) who were:

a) Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania- Then

But;

b) Burundi and Rwanda joined EAC in 2007 and became part of the initiative.

The QA Initiative in a Wider Perspective

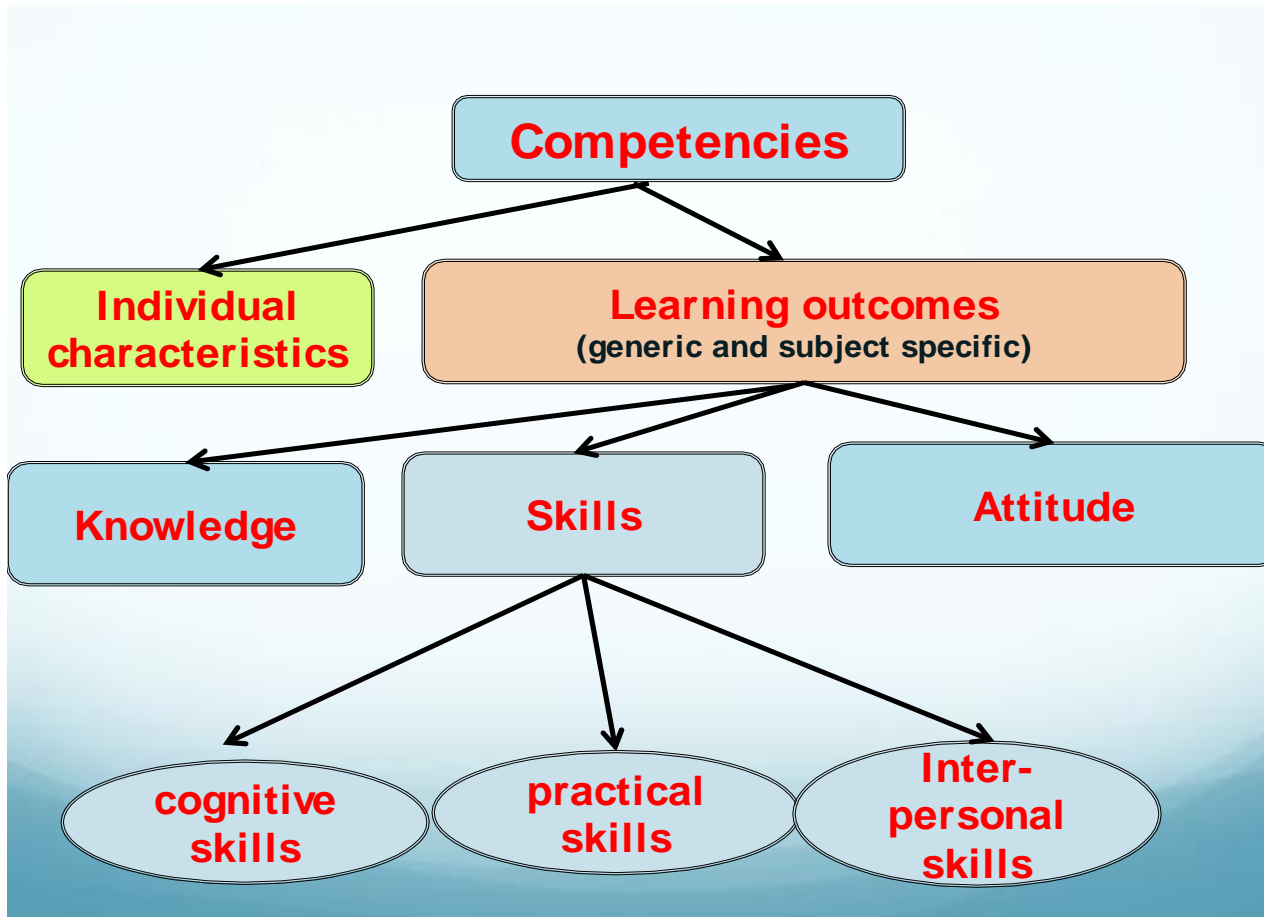
- In 2006, as partners, IUCEA and DAAD/HRK agreed on the need for a collaboration to introduce a regional quality assurance system for the Partner States of the East African Community (EAC)
- Main focus of the collaboration would be:
 1. Training of Quality assurance officers (67 have been trained)
 2. Training of program peer reviewers (74 trained so far)
 3. Development and piloting of QA tools
 - a) Handbook- *The Road Map to Quality: A Handbook for Quality assurance in Higher Education* has been developed and published in 4 volumes.
 - b) Development of subject benchmarks (our subject for today)
 4. Internal and external review of programs
 - a) Piloting of volumes 1 (*Guidelines for self-assessment at program level*) and 2 (*Guidelines for external assessment at program level*) done in 67 Universities
 - b) External review of programs (over 70 programmes) done

DEVELOPING SUBJECT BENCHMARKS IN EAST AFRICA

The main objective is to agree on the following for each of the programs in question:

- Expected learning outcomes
 - Basic Phase (what knowledge, skills and attitude must such graduates at least acquire?)
 - Specializations (what could they specialize in?)
- The curriculum (what would be content and how should it be organized)
- Student assessment (how should students be assessed to see if the ELOs have been met?)
- Role of internship (what should be the role of internship?)

The Model Used



It is recognized that

1. Students learn more than what is designed for them (ELO) and;
2. The competencies they eventually achieve are determined both by the learning process and the students individual characteristics eg IQ

Who is Involved in the Benchmarking Process?

- **Employers**- They provide information on labour market requirements
- **Professional bodies**- what are the basic requirements in order to accredit the program and accept its graduates?
- **National councils and commissions**- they are the national implementers and accreditors of programs in their respective countries. What do they require?
- **Students and alumni of the programs**- They provide info on their expectations and the strengths and weaknesses they find in programs on offer today against their experience in class and in the labour market respectively
- **Academics**- key stakeholders as they implement the programmes and also indicate the key academic requirements.

WHY ARE WE DOING IT?

In the process of carrying internal and external evaluation great, disparities were noted even for programs bearing the same name. So the benchmarks should bring about:

- **Harmonization**- not uniformity but similarity and equation
- **Transferability**- allow credit transfer because universities understand each other
- **Comparability**- Programs should be comparable in terms of students workload, content and depth of coverage, assessment, etc
- **Employability and labour mobility**- - mutual recognition of qualifications means graduates can be acceptable in the five countries easily and beyond. Workers in the region can move from one country to another easier

How Have we Done It?

- Questionnaires sent to universities to establish current practice (Analysis done prior to benchmarking meetings)
- Reference to standards set by National commissions and Councils in the region (the are active members and contributors)
- Reference to and study of standards set by International Accrediting, professional and quality assurance agencies eg
 - ✓ ABET
 - ✓ The Association of Computing Machinery
 - ✓ The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) of the UK
- Learning from best practices outside East Africa, experts from Germany invited

How Have we Done It? Continued...


- Two workshops held to agree on :
 - Definitions, descriptions and Expected learning outcomes
 - Content by subject areas
 - Role of internships and student assessment
 - Model curriculum and alignment matrix
- Document circulated to universities for validation
- Final document edited, published and approved at IUCEA and uploaded on website for use.

ARE THE DOCUMENTS BEING USED?

- Yes, BBA benchmarks are online and national commissions and councils are using them as benchmarks (www.iucea.org)
- Universities reportedly reviewing curriculum in line with benchmarks
- IT still being worked on- currently awaiting official adoption at IUCEA after which they will be published and distributed.
- Contributing to mutual recognition of qualifications- encouraging shift from focus on no. of years in school to ELOs/competencies!! (The three countries have different education systems with different lengths of time degree programs)



Looking to the Future

- Benchmarking in other fields- eyes currently set on education at regional level
 - A more integrated East African Higher Education Area
 - Greater and easier mutual recognition of qualifications and transfer of credit
 - Free movement of labour improvement
- 

IT Team at Work in Kigali, Rwanda





THE END

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

