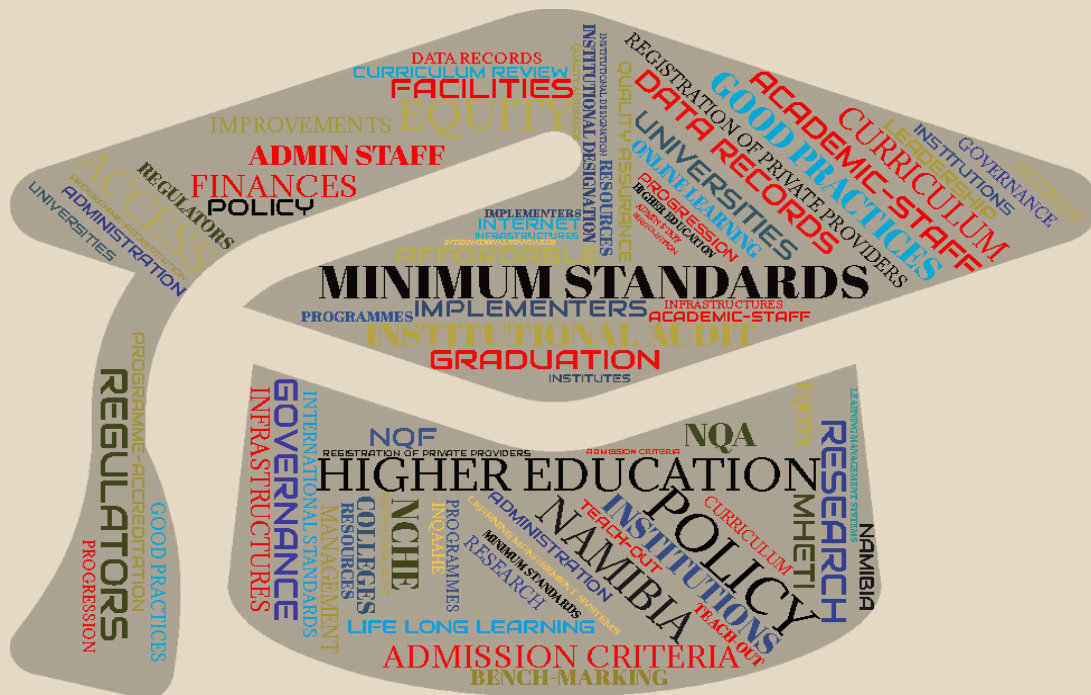




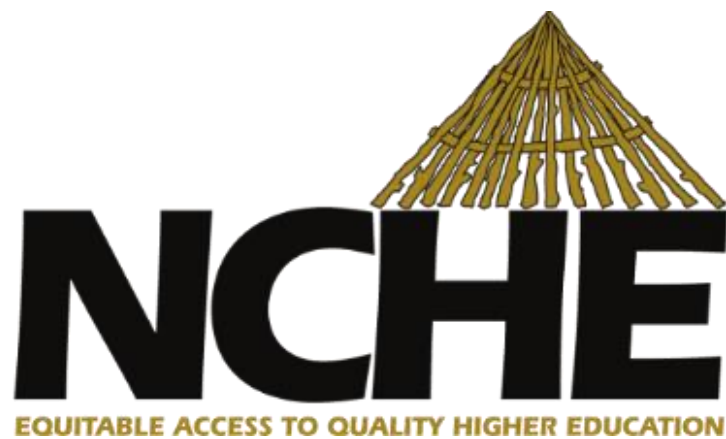
NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION



11th NCHE Public Lecture

‘Enhancing Higher Education System Performance and Efficiency through Minimum Standards’

MARCH 2023



11th Public Lecture:

**‘Enhancing Higher Education System Performance and Efficiency through
Minimum Standards’**

March 2023

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About us:

NCHE is a statutory body in terms of section 4 of the Higher Education Act, 2003 (Act No. 26 of 2003), established to advise the Minister of Higher Education, Technology and Innovation on issues pertaining to higher education.

Our logo embodies the following:

- The 'hut' symbolises a pyramid of which the 'sticks' represent the different academic streams which lead to excellence.
- The different academic streams join and guarantee 'shelter' for the nation.
- The 'hut' also symbolises unity through binding the different academic streams together.
- This unified effort emphasises coordination among our higher education institutions.

Visit us at:

www.nche.org.na

Our High Level Statements

Vision

NCHE aspires,

To be a valued leader and partner in coordinating quality higher education in pursuit of a knowledge-based society.

Mission

NCHE exists,

To ensure a coordinated and responsive higher education system through equitable access and quality service delivery.

Core Values

In the execution of our mandate and the pursuit of our strategic pillars, we are inspired and guided by the following values:

<i>Accountability</i>	We take responsibility for our policies, decisions and actions and report, explain and answer for resulting consequences.
<i>Professionalism</i>	We exercise high levels of competence in our work and avoid compromises to our set standards and values.
<i>Integrity</i>	We exhibit the quality of an intuitive sense of honesty and truthfulness with regard to our behaviour and motivation for our actions.
<i>Innovation</i>	We strive for continuous learning, seek creative ways to change, solve problems and find better solutions in executing our mandate.
<i>Empathy</i>	We endeavour to cultivate empathy amongst ourselves, customers, and stakeholders, with a view to building positive relationships and boosting productivity.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ASG-QA	African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
INQAAHE	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
ISGs	International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education
MEAC	Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture
MHETI	Ministry of Higher Education, Technology and Innovation
NCHE	National Council for Higher Education
NQA	Namibia Qualifications Authority
OECD	Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development
PAQAF	Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework
QA	Quality Assurance
SAQAN	Southern African Quality Assurance Network
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) has among its mandates as prescribed in the Higher Education Act (Act, No. 26 of 2003), to advise the line minister on matters pertaining to higher education (HE). The institutions also holds the responsibility for ensuring that the higher education institutions (HEIs) are responsive to national needs. Public lectures are part of the mechanisms that allow feeding the knowledge back into the system to improve HE outcomes. Since 2010, the NCHE has been convening annual public lectures to provide a platform for public debate on topical issues affecting higher education. The NCHE hosted the 11th public lecture on 09 March 2023 in Windhoek, Namibia.

The theme for the current lecture was ‘Enhancing Higher Education System Performance and Efficiency through Minimum Standards’ to improve the education outcomes of HE in Namibia. Launched in the 1980s, the evolution of formal HE in Namibia has been prominent with the diversification of provisions to pursue national priorities such as inclusion, equity, relevance, and enhanced access to quality education. To set the national agenda on higher education, in 1993 the Government of Namibia laid the foundations for the regulation of higher education through its policy document ‘Toward Education for All’, which provided a roadmap for education and training in post-independent Namibia.

The Namibian HE system and its quality assurance have come to a juncture of maturity that requires a more proactive role from quality assurance provisions in terms of promoting inclusion, equity, relevance, and equal access to quality education. Hence, supplementary measures are due to enhance quality assurance (QA) approaches to ensure that the ever-diversifying and expanding Namibian higher education system is relevantly equipped to meet the expectations set upon it. Following the national-level developments in quality assurance, professional associations launched quality assurance initiatives for individual professions by establishing various instruments for assuring the quality of professional programmes in the country. These bodies work closely with the public regulatory bodies and the relevant higher education institutions to regulate the offering of professional programmes, thus taking a key role in promoting the relevance of the academic offer.

The 11th public lecture was delivered in a hybrid mode, with participants attending physically at Thuringerhof Hotel and others joining online via Zoom.

The moderator for the public lecture was Patrick Sam, an education specialist, broadcasting journalist and poet. Dr Susanna Yu. Karakhanyan, an international expert, served as the keynote speaker for the discussion. Dr Alfred van Kent, the Executive Director of the Ministry of Higher Education, Technology and Innovation, gave the lecture's welcoming remarks. Additional remarks were presented by Professor Samuel John, the Chairperson of the NCHE. Lastly, the vote of thanks was presented by the Deputy Chairperson, Dr Francine Keendjele. The keynote presentation was followed by a public discussion that involved questions from the audience, both physically and online.

The full lecture recording is available online at the following link:

<https://youtu.be/Ej4aDQV5N5s?si=3gSUTelzIXFytBvb>



Dr Albert van Kent, Dr Susanna Yu. Karakhanyan, Prof. John Samuel and Dr Francine N. Keendjele at the 11th NCHE Public Lecture

Welcoming Remarks

While delivering the welcoming remarks, Dr Alfred van Kent, Executive Director of the Ministry of Higher Education, Technology and Innovation (MHETI), indicated that the hosting of the public lecture could be contextualised within the mandate of the MHETI, which is to educate and train Namibians to attain national development goals as enshrined in the national development plans and policies. The mandate of the Ministry is executed by ensuring that quality higher education and training are delivered to the Namibian nation through the advancement of quality programmes and credible projects at various public and private HEIs.



The NCHE was established through an Act of Parliament and is one of Namibia's leading agencies that ensures the delivery of quality educational programmes in Namibia. Additionally, the NCHE is expected to promote the establishment of a coordinated higher education system and facilitate the development of QA systems and capacity in the higher education sector. In an interconnected world, collaborations with partners and sister organisations from all over the world must be strengthened to attain the nation's educational aspirations.

Dr Van Kent further indicated that it is only through the exchange of expertise and experience that the enhancement of QA systems can lead to the improvement of QA instruments in Namibia. The NCHE is delighted to be a member of both the SADC QA forum known as the Southern African Quality Assurance Network (SAQAN) and other international QA bodies. He indicated that one critical intervention of the MHETI and NCHE is the development of minimum standards for higher education, which are aimed at strengthening the implementation of existing QA procedures, policies and systems.

This process was embarked on in two phases. The first phase was with local experts who worked on developing a document in terms of quality standards that would have to be followed in Namibia. The second phase included the recruitment of an international expert to refine and independently verify and authenticate the standards developed by local experts. Once the minimum

standards are finalised, Dr Van Kent indicated that there will be an approval process that will facilitate further discussions, and other clearance mechanisms will be established before the standards are implemented.

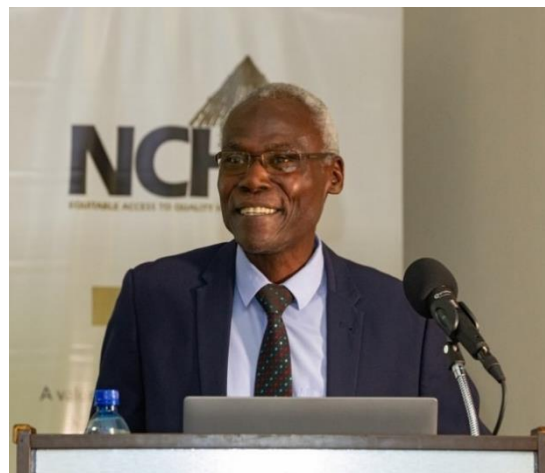
The Executive Director further elaborated that the minimum standards would help the NCHE and by extension the MHETI to ensure that Namibians have access to quality education while, at the same time, enhancing the various instruments that ensure the quality of education and training at all institutions of higher learning. Therefore, the public lecture under the theme, 'Enhancing Higher Education System Performance and Efficiency through Minimum Standards' is timely and appropriate. In embracing new technologies, these proceedings were broadcast on Zoom platforms to enable a wider audience to attend and participate in the discussion by leveraging existing open-source intellect, via social media and marketing platforms. Dr Van Kent expressed appreciation to all local and international stakeholders, partners, sister organisations and agencies that joined and participated in the public lecture.

In his concluding remarks, the Executive Director noted that the public lecture was an opportunity to engage in innovative ideas in the field of QA in higher education while, at the same time, sharing ideas on how to sharpen QA tools that already exist and are being implemented in Namibia. Aspects of strengthening coordination, and communication between various institutions are imperative to provide clarity in terms of what the nation is doing to improve quality education outcomes. Namibia also needs to ensure that the packaging of material is conducted in such a way that it is understandable by the different categories of society. At times, academically packing these issues does not allow the public to fully understand, therefore, communications about the issues need to be exploratory and robust in their future-fit approach; for example, to use the power of social media to spread the message on the need for minimum standards and its applicability in Namibia.

With the above remarks, Dr Van Kent welcomed the participants to the public lecture and underscored the importance of their participation in the finalisation of the minimum standard. He also conveyed the Ministry's optimism regarding the successful and impactful execution of this process in terms of assuring the quality of Namibia's HE system.

NCHE Chairperson Remarks

The Chairperson, Professor John Samuel, welcomed the keynote speaker, Dr Karakhanyan, and the audience, including those joining online, to the occasion of the 11th public lecture. He noted that the emphasis of the lecture was on minimum standards. He stated that it was a known fact that effective and quality HE is fundamental in generating a professional and competent workforce with globally equivalent competencies that are critical for the country to prosper and compete in the international arena.



Prof Samuel used a Japanese saying that states “you cannot manage what you cannot measure” to emphasise the need for minimum standards to provide a yardstick against which higher education can be measured. The ever-increasing diversity in higher education providers and students demands systemic instruments for assuring quality, alignment and coordination. He indicated that the minimum standards would set baseline requirements for all types of HE providers in the system to promote inclusive and enhanced equal access to quality education while, at the same time, ensuring integrity and trust in HE performance locally, regionally and globally.

At the international level, the International Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (INQAAHE) adopted the International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (ISGs). The ISGs embrace the diversity in tertiary education and empower the enhancement capacity of quality providers in their quest for diversification, efficiency, relevance, and transformative power. At the continental level, the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA) were developed as part of the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF) to provide a continental framework that harmonises higher education quality assurance systems and promotes compatible methodologies. The ASG-QA are common minimum standards or requirements. They aim to support higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in developing adequate internal and external quality assurance systems and practices that correspond to good international practices.

The Namibian higher education system and its quality assurance have come to a juncture of maturity that requires a more proactive role from quality assurance providers in promoting inclusion, equity, relevance, and equal access to quality education; therefore, the need for the country to engage in a discussion for minimum standards for HE. The Chairperson reiterated that the nature of minimum standards is to only indicate the bare minimum that institutions should put in place to meet the basic quality standards. Prof. John welcomed Dr Susanna Karakhanyan an expert in Quality Assurance, who was to deliver the lecture. Her work at the INQAAHE has given clarity on the different dynamics in various countries with respect to QA. The Chairperson expressed hope that everybody will leave with new knowledge on minimum standards and how they can enhance QA systems in Namibia's higher education system.

Keynote Presentation

The keynote presenter was Dr Susanna Karakhanyan. She indicated from the outset that the purpose of the public lecture was to concentrate on minimum standards by establishing multiple methods of measurement for HEIs. She also indicated that the topic had to be discussed in the context of global trends, and therefore an understanding of what was happening at an international level needed to be set as things have changed drastically. She also



indicated that the theme, 'Enhancing Higher Education System Performance and Efficiency through Minimum Standards', is a highly relevant topic to higher education. The presentation expanded on this point by evaluating higher education systems, and discussed a summary of Namibia and its context.

Evolution of higher education

The presenter started with the history of the evolution of higher education as a key starting point for evaluating the conceptual aspects of the lecture. From the 1970s to the 2020s, not a lot has changed in the provision of higher education. There are no huge differences in how HEIs have been catering to students in the last 50 years, although a huge learning paradigm shift has taken place in learning. The learning paradigm shift has gone beyond formal higher education and has witnessed a rise in informal and non-formal education. Hence the

question: what are the implications of a shift in learning trends for higher education?

Learning paradigm shift

Understanding the evolution of higher education in relation to a shift in learning paradigms is a key undertaking. The way students learn has changed drastically as they no longer learn from one source. Students learn from a diversity of sources. At the same time, there are no longer limitations to the age of learning, modalities, means of learning and the technology of learning. The huge diversity of learning sources has ensured that technology is constantly entering and exiting in new ways with tons of new developments. For example, the introduction of ChatGPT led to a debate that proposed that the service could be used for cheating at HEIs while, at the same time, another tool that could detect cheating was also developed. Hence, change and transformation are constants, and this means that the system is currently in an era of a major paradigm shift.

The Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), jointly with the Council of Advance Education in the US, developed a tool for the measurement of learning gains of students in 15 developed countries. The evidence showed that entering and exiting students demonstrated insignificant learning gains in transferable skills. This research sends a clear signal that HEIs are doing something wrong. According to Harvard Professor Bok (2017), due to the learning paradigm shift and as evidenced by student abilities, students learn 50% less in the formal curriculum than their predecessors did 50 years ago in universities. Although the settings are the same, the students are learning 50% less. The discussion on value added by programmes is significant because the ways of measuring the learning gains of students have become prioritised. Multiple factors affect the learning gains of students, measuring what students gain in learning after completing the program.

Higher learning: Disruptions, diversification, differentiation

A global study conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in which Dr Karakhanyan was involved, examined higher education disruptions, diversification and differentiation. The study that was themed “*Shift in currency of education*” also examined the history of education evolution, identifying the three major disruptions as follows:

- ***Technology Revolution 1:*** Introduction of Alphabet (10th Century) - introduction of letters

- **Technology Revolution 2:** Mass Production of Books (16th Century) - introduction of books to education
- **Technology Revolution 3:** ICT in Education - introduction of ICT into education

Currently, the system is in Technology Revolution 2, and HEIs are lagging in Technology Revolution 3 because the currency of education used to be information. A student in the Middle Ages would pay for information because the currency of education at that time was information. However, society is currently in the information era, therefore, students are not attending HEIs to get information, but students are going to get analytical and critical skills.

The systems are not merely experiencing these changes as diversification is also happening in higher education. Students are dealing with diverse contexts and different sources, while having to prioritise the factors that influence their learning and, at the same time, navigating how to build learning pathways and a career. These are realities that HEIs must keep in mind before changes are made and standards are introduced to the system. It is not only formal education that matters, because higher education has extended to informal and non-formal education with the classic model in formal education merely providing bachelors, master's, and doctoral programmes.

Programme diversification: Vertical and horizontal

In recent years, in formal education, HEIs have been adjusting their approaches and have introduced short programmes, pre-masters and post master's and short degree programmes. It is difficult for students to make good choices for their careers at a young age, therefore, new programmes are being introduced by HEIs. For example, in the Dutch or Nordic systems, new courses and programmes are introduced so that students can change their orientation and adjust to careers according to their passions. It is increasingly evident that when students do not have a passion, they cannot contribute meaningfully to society. Therefore, the classic model no longer takes care of all the current learning needs of students, and this has led to the expansion of alternative education.

Alternative education in the context of higher education is also referred to as micro-credentials. Micro-credentials are short courses that allow credentials to accumulate by allowing students to top-up and carry-over credentials into a qualification through accumulation. For example, working while studying is an option that can be introduced as an opportunity for learning to provide access

to inclusive quality education. There are limited to no tools available that measure the quality of alternative education; therefore, the provision of QA is compromised. In 2022, the INQAAHE developed the first-ever set of standards that also covered micro-credentials. However, these set of minimum standards only cover HEIs that offer micro-credentials and are not extended to the many other providers of micro-credentials like Google and Amazon.

The market for micro-credentials is rapidly growing as there is an increase in the demand for flexible learning paths. The diversity in sources requires an individual student to have their own pathways, which requires different opportunities to build their own learning pathways. This means that the students need to have the choice to 'exit and enter' the system when they want to as well as to have the opportunity to work and study at the same time. These opportunities must be created for the system to catch up with things that have already been missing in assuring quality. Most HEIs ideologically discuss the approach as 'student-centred education'; however, what happens is time-based curriculum. The provision of higher education is measured by time and not by the acquisition of skills.

The learning shift paradigm has changed the currency of education for students and HEIs must adapt accordingly. The currency of education is fundamental in problem-solving, basic skills development, wisdom, and insight. The current model of HEIs is increasingly not as relevant as it has fully emerged out of the currency of education as information. Therefore, the current model must adapt to the changes required especially in HEIs. For example, the need for flexibility in student-focused education would allow talented students less time in the system to acquire the required skills and less talented students more time to graduate.

Different learning pathways must be established for the diverse needs of students. The UNESCO study further notes the factors that prevent the current relevance of formal HEIs and their programmes. Multiple factors were identified with multifaceted reasons to explain the phenomenon.

Key issues in keeping up with the trends

The following were the key issues in keeping up with the trends of the relevance of formal education in HEIs:

- **Curriculum:** time-based curriculum, theory-dominated, limited opportunity for first-hand exposure to reality and stakeholder engagement.

- **Academic Staff:** lack of special training for academic staff, promotion and valuation based on research, inadequate compensation and incentives policy, limited industry exposure.
- **Regulators:** no clarity in the expectations from HEIs, tertiary learning not a priority on the government agenda, regulations preventing the industry from having a meaningful engagement, and infringed academic freedom and autonomy.
- **HEIs:** insufficient investment in updating programmes, inadequate capacity to face the challenges and disruptions, lack of data-driven decision-making, limited stakeholder engagement, and a dire need to re-imagine the approach to leadership and management to embrace change.
- **Industry and Professional associations:** lack of trust and understanding between HEIs and industry, professional associations concerned with professionals rather than professions and professional standards, lack of subject-specific criteria.
- **Education systems:** lack of systemic approach to education changes across all levels, lack of system-wide data to guide decision making.

In general, education systems are given directives to introduce change and to ensure that this change takes place. The traditional response provides solutions that 'patch' the problems 'here and there'. Patching is an approach to solving most problems and it's aimed at closing the gaps, but instead of solving the problems, the systems end up building the 'Frankenstein's Monster Effect'. This is when problems in the education system are not systematically resolved but are continuously addressed on a case-by-case basis rather than instating comprehensive change. The status is a global issue in which countries are stuck in the old learning paradigm, while simultaneously attempting to move on by revising their approach to higher learning, amending the legal and regulatory frameworks, adjusting QA standards, and proposing diverse measurement methods as possible solutions. Countries are slowly catching up with the developments in higher learning, although their approach is not systemic.

To establish a new framework for HEIs, there is a need to address academic freedom and autonomy. This conversation needs to take place in the context of the core values of HEIs because they are directly linked. For example, it could be easy for universities to complain about the introduction of new standards as an infringement on their academic autonomy, and generally, HEIs can complain and state that these standards are not acceptable. Therefore, it is critical to differentiate and create an understanding of the definition of academic freedom or autonomy. The definition of academic freedom must be aligned with the core values of the education system. A global perspective on core values and the

evolution of education recognises academic freedom and its application in a contemporary context of higher education without necessarily providing a standard definition for academic freedom. The definition of academic freedom should be embedded in the core values.

Core values of higher education

The core values of HEIs were first introduced by the Magna Charta in 1988, signed by 388 rectors from universities on the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna, which reflected the fundamental values of university tradition. In addition, 'Schools at Risk' is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that protects the interest of students and they have come up with academic values of equitable access, accountability, institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and social responsibility as core values. These values are informed by international human rights law, UNESCO instruments and related civil society statements based on many studies conducted by the organisation. Furthermore, 'Future of Education', an initiative implemented in 2022 by UNESCO, recognised respect, empathy, equality and solidarity as musts to be incorporated into the core of the mission of universities, colleges, and technical institutes in the future.

Autonomy vs accountability: Maintaining the balance

The notion of academic freedom is highlighted within the core values of many frameworks without a specific definition because the principle of establishing core values for HEIs is significant.

Autonomy means different things in different contexts. As many education systems are revised, the law usually introduces autonomy in terms of organisational, financial, academic, and staffing matters; hence, there are different definitions for autonomy. There is no unified framework or universal definition for academic freedom. Each country must adapt to the notion of having core values and using existing freedoms and adopting those to the core values of higher education in their country. The country should define its core values in the education system and promote them in a way that they are defined in the higher education system through the curriculum and research by scholars. The issue of academic freedom is about autonomy, but if autonomy exists in isolation, it leads to anarchy.

The notion of autonomy in education systems is multifaceted and includes the following factors:

- **Organisational:** decide on Governing Bodies composition, decide on academic structures, create legal entities
- **Financial:** length and type of public funding, keep surplus, borrow money, own buildings, charge tuition fees
- **Staffing:** decide on recruitment, decide on salaries (senior academic/senior admin), decide on dismissal of staff (senior academic/senior admin, decide on promotion
- **Academic:** decide on overall student numbers, select students, introduce programmes, terminate programmes, choose language of instruction, select quality assurance mechanisms and providers, design content of degree programmes

Higher education needs to be accountable to society at large because the mission of higher education is to function in a manner that serves society. The need to preserve the balance between autonomy and accountability is a critical success factor for HEIs. When autonomy is allowed to exist without accountability, there will be abuse of the core values or misuse in different settings. Establishing autonomy without balancing it with accountability is problematic. Unless autonomy intersects with accountability, there will always be a problem. However, if autonomy is allowed to co-exist with accountability, then a balance can be struck.

The QA tools for accountability are external evaluations, transparent performance, reporting tools, scorecards, and other multiple measuring methods. When introducing minimum standards, these perspectives are paramount and, therefore, need to be incorporated into the changes aimed at delivering inclusive and equitable quality education. Every time an element of autonomy is introduced into the system, it must be linked to a measure of accountability. Accountability strengthens the education system because it is clear in its purpose: Who is paying for your services? Is it the government, the parents, the students? The source of income requires accountability from HEIs.

Guiding documents in the development of standards

There are key terminologies and principles that need to be used when developing the framework for the minimum standards. These are also established from the core values and are articulated in the national documents

adopted by the country. According to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture in Namibia, the core values are drafted towards achieving ‘Education for All’, and they clearly specify access, equity, quality, and democracy as the key elements. At the same time, Namibia has made a commitment towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 4 which aims to obtain inclusive, equitable, quality education. It is important to note that Namibia is not aiming for access to any type of education, but it is clearly articulating the provision of quality education. This means that the institutions must take on the responsibility of offering equitable quality education and that multiple stakeholders need to work together.

Without minimum standards, it becomes impossible to ensure equitable access to quality education. When the students are paying for a service, the biggest service that is being given to them is a ‘qualification’. Therefore, the use of the qualification needs to be determined. A qualification is not useful if it is not recognised, but it is only valuable to students when it is recognised locally, regionally, and internationally. The qualification must meet the minimum requirements for recognition. If the qualification is not recognised, then there is no value in the qualification, and there is no justification for the students to pay for it. There needs to be some level of recognition, and for recognition to be mainstreamed, major conventions need to be adopted. The recognition agreements are within the United Nations (UN) Conventions.

Table 1: Recognition of Qualifications: UN Conventions

Region (Year)	Legal instrument	Point of Contact
LAC (2019)	Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean	UNESCO Santiago
Africa (2014)	Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees, and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States (Addis Convention)	UNESCO Dakar
Asia and the Pacific (2011)	Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education	UNESCO Bangkok
Arab States (1978)	Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States	UNESCO Beirut
Mediterranean Region (1976)	Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States Bordering on the Mediterranean	Mediterranean Recognition Information Centres (MERIC) Network
Europe and North America (1997)	Lisbon Recognition Convention	ENIC-NARIC Networks

Namibia needs to consider two conventions that include a regional and a global agreement. The regional convention is the Addis Convention that has been brought into effect with the signing of 13 member states. The document is currently active, and it aims to establish mechanisms that promote recognition locally, regionally and globally. Member states that have signed are allowed to enter the network of recognition which helps support students. At a global level, in 2020, the UN Convention was signed by 21 countries and came into effect on the 5th of March 2023. It is, therefore, currently an active document as well. Through these conventions, member states can establish special mechanisms and instruments like national information centres while, at the same time, setting up the standards of recognition of qualifications. The two regional and global conventions are complimentary to each other, and Namibia should consider signing these conventions in order to enhance the value of the qualifications through recognition.

The education system that ensures quality education acknowledges that there is no single solution for QA. In fact, there is a coherent suite of tools that make QA work in higher education. Here is a suite of tools required:

- Soft regulations
- National Policies, Legal and regulatory frameworks
- Funding mechanisms
- Performance standards (including minimum)
- Education values: skills and competencies
- Learning environments
- Systemic capacity: human resources, enhanced communication and understanding.

Acknowledging that the introduction of minimum standards directly addresses performance systems and not the entire education system is fundamental in ensuring that the system needs more than minimum standards to be efficient. Due to the multi-dimensional nature of the education system, the introduction of minimum standards cannot be expected to resolve all the issues. Minimum standards are built for a specific reason, which is to deal with performance standards and it entails the measurement of the minimum requirements to enter higher education and remain relevant. Setting those bare minimum requirements as enablers is critical. Many HEIs can argue that the introduction of a new set of standards is overburdening. However, if the standards are built and designed in a way that contributes to quality higher education, then it should be considered a positive change.

Studying the global trends in QA is essential in order to identify mechanisms that are intended to be interlinked to allow higher education to be the provider of quality education. According to a quote by Kaoru Ishikawa (1915-1989) from Japan who is considered to be the 'Father of QA', "as with many other things there is a surprising amount of prejudice against quality control, but the proof of the pudding is still in the eating". The students 'have to taste it' and, therefore, HEIs need to ensure that the quality of the service is assured. For this context to be understood, a historical structural view of the evolution of QA systems needs to be discussed. It is necessary to address the issue of why accreditation or QA started in the first place, and secondly, why there is a need to introduce minimum standards for QA. Given the evolution of QA systems, it is imperative to understand how the structure evolved historically to contemporary times.

External quality assurance evolution and landscape

In the late 19th century in the USA, a couple of higher education institutions came together, which today are known as 'Ivy League' universities to address the issue of massification. Massification is the mushrooming of HEIs, and these universities decided that they would not allow anyone to come into their system. Whoever entered their institutions had to be a credible student or faculty. It started with these institutions and carried on throughout the modern century when QA became so powerful that it turned into a compliance tool, but initially, it was built as an enhancement tool to ensure trust and credibility. There is a current call for HEIs to take the initial undertaking of QA back by leading with internal QA, and external QA can assist as a complementary mechanism.

The mainstreaming of QA tools and instruments should be led by HEIs and supported by external QA. In the 1930s, QA systems spread to Japan, and to the UK and the islands of the Philippines in the 1960s. In 1965, the US Department of State ensured the evaluation of evaluators. The natural evolution of accreditors led to the explosion of accreditors. Currently, most accreditors are in the US, and therefore, the evaluation of evaluators is at another level because HEIs need to be evaluated by the US Department of State or by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), a non-profit higher education organisation, to access government funding.

In the 1980s, massification became a global concept without QA growing at the same pace. In 1991, INQAAHE was established as the 1st global network, which allowed for the global expansion of QA providers. Currently in Namibia, both the NCHE and the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) are proud members of INQAAHE, and it has a membership of more than 350 institutions that are supported through global outreach initiatives. At the global level, INQAAHE remains at the forefront as the only global network for QA. At the same time, there has been an expansion of regional networks with their own missions to address regional requirements in terms of QA, including the evaluation of evaluators.

According to an INQAAHE Study “Global Trends in Higher Education Quality Assurance: Challenges and Opportunities in Internal and External Quality Assurance” (Karakhanyan & Stensaker, 2020), out of approximately 345 QA bodies operating worldwide, around 142 have been evaluated externally and have been recognised by regional and other international quality assurance networks. Around 258 country bodies are members of a regional or international network. In Africa, the establishment of SAQAN as a regional network also supports QA mechanisms. Importantly, evaluation of evaluators mostly only happens in developed countries; it is a requirement that is referred to as voluntary, but it happens to be mandatory. The trends in the other regions, namely developing countries, are evolving in the process of the evaluation of evaluators as many governments are making this process mandatory. INQAAHE is requested to do many of these evaluations as it is the only global organisation that has the capacity to do so.

Performance standards: A wider mission

The wider mission of performance standards is essential for higher education. This is particularly important when you start asking, ‘When do you start trusting a system?’ Namibian higher education has become hugely diversified throughout its forty-plus years of education development with the provision of public and private education, cross-border education providers, and virtual and online providers. The introduction of minimum standards does not work when the standards are differently developed for public or private institutions. The constitution highlights that private institutions can enter the market if they are providing equivalent education to the public sector. These were the keywords underpinning the principles that have been taken to formulate the baseline for the minimum standards.

Thus, the wider mission for performance standards that are relevant for both internal and external QA are as follows:

- Equal access to quality education
- Safeguarding students
- Trust and credibility, reliability and validity in evaluations
- Recognition of qualifications
- International comparability and competitiveness

In the long run, Namibia must aspire for gradual enhancement of comparability, competitiveness, and international visibility of the education system. Hence, in developing the minimum standards, a comparative analysis has been conducted to ensure that Namibia's standards keep up with international trends.

Methodology and design methods

The methodology is key as systems can end up merely patching the gaps and end up with the Frankenstein Monster Effect. On the other hand, the education system can be designed to work like the Dubai 'Museum of the Future' which was established to be elegant, coherent, and compatible. It is important to note that building standards is an art. Therefore, the country has an opportunity to develop minimum standards that will collapse existing frameworks or deliver new ones that promote inclusive and equitable quality education.

One size does not fit all!

The process of developing standards is imperative. In many instances, standards are developed with the 'one size fits all' mentality, but the truth is that the 'sizes are different'. If this is the case, how come standards exist? At the entry of the education system, this could make sense, but as the system evolves and embraces diversity, this could become nuanced and require more sophisticated analysis for the growth trajectory. With ever-increasing diversification, it is noticeable that one set of standards simply does not fit all. At the same time, if the standards are too broad, it challenges the measure. When developing standards that are measurable, it is important for the standards to be SMART in design, that is:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable

- Realistic and anchored within
- Timeframe

A balanced approach

Universal standards are crucial to promote recognition, portability, and transferability of credentials. Standards are not inherently bad. Therefore, there should be a common understanding of minimum standards in a universal language that helps other systems understand the Namibian education system. The systems should understand each other by being easily interpretable. The concept of universal standards is significant, and it is the design that matters most. Universal standards can ruin or build higher education. As stated by Professor Bjorn Stensaker, “Higher education providers need to have enough autonomy to perform their mission to the expected level of quality”. Simultaneously, HEIs must have autonomy balanced with accountability. Without accountability structures, regulators can interfere in the institution's direct operations. Once accountability structures are set and autonomy is provided to HEIs, QA institutions can steer from far away and can guide instead of control HEIs.

Multiple measurement methods: Diversity of mechanisms, purposes and use cases

Globally, the introduction of minimum standards in its implementation has to do with multiple measurement methods that include a diversity of mechanisms, purpose and use cases. The framework goes beyond the traditional 12-16 standards. The mainstreaming of diverse measurements serves different purposes. At the entry point, the requirements are totally different from those that are in full operation and they get cyclical reviews, involving:

- Initial Licensure: minimum requirements to start operations
- Initial accreditation: minimum requirements to start admission

For example, at the entry level, the minimum standard could require four academic staff per programme to establish a new program. This is to ensure that students have credible lecturers as a bare minimum. The standards are also there to ensure that 300 students are not being taught by one professor in all the courses. There should be bare minimum standards to ensure students get quality education. Once HEIs get fully-fledged, the conditions are different with many more tools to ensure QA. These tools include the following:

- Institutional licensing

- Programme accreditation
- Self-accrediting HEIs
- Professional accreditors
- Risk-based reviews – reviews based on multiple measurement metrics
- Accreditation of short learning
- Rankings
- Ratings

In many developed countries, the self-accreditation of higher education has become a common practice as HEIs are only accredited by the regulator as an institution, which grants them the right to do accreditation of their own programmes following specific procedures. In addition, the purpose of the evaluation can also differ with professional accreditors aiming to measure professional standards whereas other evaluators measure learning outcomes and relevance to market needs.

Increasingly, many countries are also adopting risk-based reviews. For example, in the UK, they no longer do reviews because of the multiple cycles of audits conducted, and the exercise has become routine and of little use to QA. The new approach allows the risk-based reviews to set indicators at a system level with methods measuring teaching and learning indicators, safeguarding student finances, and the setting up of these indicators allows for data collection from institutions. Once risk is detected, only then is an audit conducted.

Rankings have their own issues, only a small sample of universities partake in rankings. Currently, from about sixty thousand universities globally, approximately only two thousand participate in rankings as they tend to have an English and research bias without necessarily measuring more meaningful indicators like sustainable development.

Accreditation fatigue can take place when diverse HEIs must use similar standards and become overburdened. Diverse tools are imperative to complement the system in a manner that is building on the system. An efficient QA system has multiple measurement tools that are all built to complement and supplement each other.

The Namibian context

In the Namibian context, so far, there have been two major phases in the introduction of the minimum standards. The outcome conveys that the

Namibian higher education system is characterised by steady growth, massification and diversification.

An overview of the Namibian higher education landscape is presented in Tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2: The landscape of HEIs in Namibia by 2021

Total # of students:	68,932
Total # of HEIs:	18
Number of public HEIs:	3
3 HEIs qualify as comprehensive universities: 2 public & 1 private- 77.9% of the student population	
Total number of programmes:	672
Number of doctoral programmes:	44 enrolling 0.5% of all students
Number of programmes with less than 10 students:	190 programmes
Out of 18 HEIs - 7 have less than 70 students.	

Table 3: Breakdown of the HEI Landscape in Namibia

Type	# of Students	%	Scope	#of HEIs
Comprehensive University	53,672	77,9%	More than 4 field-specific areas across all qualification levels	3
Institute	6,367	9.2%	75% (or more) in 1 field-specific area. Postgraduate diploma as the highest qualification.	2
College	7,966	11,5%	More than 1 field-specific area. Postgraduate diploma as the highest qualification. Postgraduate diploma is not more than 10% of the offer.	6
Specialised College	694	1,3%	75% (or more) programmes are in 1 field of study. Postgraduate diploma is not more than 10% of the offer.	7
All HEIs	68,932	100%		18

At this stage of development, massification and diversification are present and enrolment in public education is much higher. Although, at a lesser rate - there is growth and demand in the private education sector as well. These developments are critical for the enhancement of the Namibian education system. Since the establishment of the Namibian higher education in the 1980s, the system has grown seventeen times. As of 2021, the overall student population was 98,932, out of which 47,942 were enrolled in public institutions and 20,990 were attending private HEIs.

It is important to note that even though there is demand and growth, the number of programmes with few students enrolled tells a story of a higher education system that is offering programmes that could be irrelevant and not

market-related. Out of the 672 programmes offered, 190 or the equivalent of 28% of the programmes have less than 10 students enrolled. As a result, it will be difficult to have more academic staff than students, and HEIs are less likely to hire a minimum of four academic staff to teach the students. Alternatively, the HEIs tend to force academic staff from other departments that are not necessarily professional in a particular qualification to teach such qualifications. However, the student ends up graduating with a qualification that was given by a non-professional.

The term ‘diploma meal’ is used to explain the fact that students receive diplomas that might not be recognised. It is, therefore, not in the interest of HEIs to keep programmes that have such few students. HEIs need to look at the indicators that show that the programme is not relevant and then change and develop new programmes that have more demand and are more relevant and attractive. Due to the massification that is happening, the introduction of minimum standards gives students the confidence that they are entering a programme that has the bare minimum requirement and is of value to their future.

Key principles

A robust quality assurance system for higher education is imperative to ensure the integrity of qualifications and the maintenance of academic standards in the country. The introduction of minimum standards provides the framework for QA that is based on the following key principles:

- Inclusiveness
- Equal access to quality education
- Efficiency
- Consistency
- Accountability
- Transparency

The key principles lay the foundation for minimum standards that are established to embrace diversity in student populations, programmes, and age groups. Namibia stands to benefit the following from the introduction and evolution of minimum standards in higher education.

What's in it for us?

The benefits that the minimum standards evolve around are:

- Safeguarding the students, and the academic and administrative staff by ensuring sustainable operations of HE providers in Namibia.
- Ensuring consistency and transparency in external evaluation in HEIs, hence sustainable performance.
- Supplementing and complementing the current QA standards and guidelines by providing a robust baseline for higher education operations.

The minimum standards

In Namibia's evolution to introducing minimum standards, it must be noted that the gaps in the system are currently being patched and that it is difficult to implement systemic and comprehensive change. There are phases for the introduction of minimum standards and the first step in the process of change is to prioritise safeguarding students in higher education. In doing so, the 2nd draft version of the minimum standards aims to eliminate all types of overlap and repetition of standards. The intention is to introduce change gradually, and currently, the aim is to supplement the enhancement of the current standards and to make sure the elimination of diploma mills takes place.

The minimum standards are built across four majors: dimensions, institutional, programme, research and resources (Table 4).

Table 4: The Dimensions of the Minimum Standards

Institution	Programme	Research	Resources
(i) Institutional Designation/Nomenclature	(i) Administration & Enrolment	Research Capacity	(i) Infrastructure & Facilities
(ii) Governance & Administration	(ii) Curriculum		(ii) Finances
(iii) Internal Quality Assurance	(iii) Academic & Admin Staff		(iii) Student Support Services
	(iv) Progression & Graduation		
	(v) Records Management & Teach Out		

Institution

The dimensions of the minimum standards identify the institution as the key element. A nomenclature typology of the institutions is designed to identify the various HEIs from comprehensive universities, specialised colleges, institutes, or colleges – clear definitions have been developed to ensure minimum standards

for each different type of HEI. Governance is key because HEIs have different governance structures and they were provided with requirements for governance and administration. Minimum standards for internal QA were also set because when internal QA is strong, then the implementation of QA comes from the HEIs which ensures that all the processes are institutionally driven.

Programme

A focus on the programmes looks at the whole journey of students, starting with admission, enrolment, and administration, for example, specific requirements for curriculum such as how many students should be there per academic staff. Establishing these bare minimum requirements is essential and consulting the stakeholders for discussion on how to adjust the institutional operations with the introduction of the minimum standards is strategic to minimise the impact on the system. Additional requirements on the academic and administrative staff and the progression and minimum requirements for graduation were also set. HEIs are required to develop a 'teach out or phase out' plan, with instructions on the procedures that will take place if the institution closes. Record management for students is important for the qualification to remain valuable to the student even after the HEI happens to close.

Research

Research and research capacity of universities is also a crucial component to regulate. There are different HEIs and, for each one, there are different research requirements.

Resource

Resources entail space management for students and academic staff. Finances are at the core of the organisation; therefore, budget standards are key indicators of the organisation's health. Suppose 80% of the budget is allocated to salaries and pay scale. In that case, the HEI is only making provision for teaching and learning and is neglecting other aspects of the wider mission which also includes research and service to society. Therefore, in the minimum standards, from the profits that are obtained, the HEIs are made to reinvest in research and education enhancement through minimum requirements for budget allocation and student support services.

Embracing change

It is imperative for HEIs to embrace meaningful change. As stated by Winston S. Churchill in a favourite quote, "To improve is to change, to perfect is to change often", there is no problem or issue with constant change particularly in a

system. What is needed is love for education and an elegant design that must be implemented in order to achieve inclusive and equitable quality higher education that is able to achieve the core values that are set by the Namibian education system through the introduction of minimum standards for higher education.

According to the UN Convention on Higher Education, there are three specific missions for HEIs – teaching and learning, research, and service to society. The minimum standards cover the key components and reiterate that the role of minimum standards is not to resolve all the problems of the system, or it is not the intention for minimum standards to replace other standards, but to rather serve as complementary and supplementary to enhancing the current existing standards. The design and implementation of the minimum standards in higher education are critical to ensuring the provision of inclusive and equitable quality higher education in Namibia.

INQAAHE 17th Biennial Conference 2023

Dr Karakhanyan concluded by inviting all stakeholders to the INQAAHE 17th Biennial Conference 2023 which is to take place in Astana, Kazakhstan from 29 May 2023 to 1 June 2023. The theme will be ‘Roadmap to Enabling Quality in Tertiary Education 2030’, and issues to be discussed will include:

- Fostering quality of flexible learning pathways
- Digitalisation of teaching and learning without compromising quality
- Quality assurance of cross-border education
- Core values and quality of tertiary education

Discussions with Moderator and Audience



Keynote Speaker, Dr Susanna Yu. Karakhanyan and Moderator, Patrick Sam

Dr Karakhanyan's presentation was followed by a plenary discussion, characterised by questions from the moderator and the audience.

Patrick Sam: Considering the consolidation of the value chain that you spoke about in your presentation, particularly around the four pillars you mentioned, a question arises about accountability that needs to occur at the student and stakeholders' level. How does one address the human factor, such as feeling inferior or insecure because of the proposed changes?

Dr Karakhanyan: This is a key part of my research - In the principle of value satisfaction, if one is unaware of the values of change agents, you cannot change them. If you are unaware of the values of your higher education stakeholders, you cannot change them. Thus, filling this knowledge gap makes them more comfortable with this change, which is key. Similarly, most students exist within their own world – living in their own mode of learning modality. Therefore, it is

important to do research on your students. We must investigate how students learn, in order to design the methodology for learning. Likewise, with the key stakeholders of higher education, identifying incentive mechanisms is crucial in identifying value satisfaction.

Patrick Sam: In practical terms and in terms of value satisfaction, as evaluators, lecturers, etc., who is it that they are accountable to? Is it to the student primarily, or to the institution?

Dr Karakhanyan: Accountability is different.

Patrick Sam: In terms of the reality of accountability and finding that one's performance management is under this institution, one would report back to their boss. However, you provide a paradigm shift in that one must focus on the client (where the demand comes from) and not on the institution (who is supplying the qualification or accreditation). Thus, why is that paradigm shift needed, to shift accountability primarily from one's boss and institution and onto the student, to create balance?

Dr Karakhanyan: Well, there are some links, and these are hidden links which we don't know of. When it comes to autonomy, we're not making the paradigm shift, but it happens independently. It evolves and shapes itself as we change, as the technology advances and as the system advances. Furthermore, in terms of accountability, why would one be accountable to the customer? If you are providing value satisfaction, to satisfy that value, one must know what drives them – so accountability is actually key to balancing any system. For example, if funding comes from the government, from parents, from students or elsewhere, it does not matter, but why were you given that funding? For a purpose, and now one must report back on their performance, on achieving the objectives set in front of them. Unless you are accountable for what you have done, then resource systems collapse, go into corruption and suffer greatly due to that lack of accountability. There are examples of countries that set autonomy freely, and then they started suffering from anarchy in the system due to a lack of accountability. However, once this balance is set up, it almost always works.

Question from audience: Referring to quality assurance and around assessment, pre and post COVID-19, particularly in-class assessments versus

virtual assessments, explain how that works. Is the value proposition still the same?

Dr Karakhanyan: The COVID-19 outbreak and lockdowns that happened almost overnight helped surface all our problems in the system, which proved that our global education system is not sustainable. We're talking about lockdown when everybody was confined to their homes and most people during this time did not have access to the internet or were suffering from electricity blackouts and thus could not participate in online education.

Globally education systems are not ready for sustainable education, which should be the number one priority of all governments. Likewise, due to the impact of COVID-19, examinations became a major issue for institutions, and they are still an issue because education technology development has moved at a relatively slow pace. However, in the minimum standards, we also set some minimum requirements for online examinations, such as proctoring and authentication systems. So, there are some solutions, but it will take an entire system to train all faculty in that system. COVID-19 taught us many valuable lessons, and developments should come from that, but this must be a joint effort. It cannot be the responsibility of a singular entity to come up with a solution for a collective problem - a systemic problem - but all relevant stakeholders must join efforts and feel accountable for providing a solution.



Mr Benhard Mbaeva: Audience Member

Question from audience: In terms of safeguarding and access, how does one maintain the balance between performance and efficiency on the one hand and safeguarding students' interests on the other?

Dr Karakhanyan: Considering the purpose of this lecture, we are promoting access to quality HE, not just access to higher education, because everyone who enters higher education has the right to quality education. Minimum standards do not deny your right to operate; it embraces a diversity of providers. However, there must be a bare minimum that one must provide to the student. It is crucial to differentiate between access to quality education and the chance to get into the diploma meal - a system that prints out diplomas without any award of a qualification. Thus, that balance needs to be maintained.



Ms Fiina Vatuva: Audience Member

Patrick Sam: So, what you are essentially saying is that it is in the student's best interest to go to an institution where quality, performance, and efficiency and all the other inputs mentioned are highly considered and that they are actually mutually inclusive as a concept - being that the demand works with the quality of the supply?

Dr Karakhanyan: Absolutely. Look at the number of programmes here. There are about 190 programmes with less than 10 students. Thus, it does not talk about access, because, if there was access, those programmes would be filled with 100+ students, and they wouldn't be targeted as a major risk area for the system. So, there is a difference, and we are not limiting any access to these standards to the education system. If you are providing the bare minimum and are relevant, you are welcome there. On the issue of the relevance of the programmes and the links to the market needs, one must be relevant to provide the student with the necessary skills to flourish beyond HE. Therefore, regardless, whether it is the students or government paying, the goal is to obtain credentials that work.

Question from audience: In terms of synergies with technical and vocational education training, you also speak of the great expansion within the formal sector between these short, pre-masters and post-masters courses, which creates a greater spectrum in terms of the supply from the institutions of higher learning. However, having primarily spoken about quality, and with reference to the synergy to TVET, why is it important to have those synergies, or is it not important at all?

Dr Karakhanyan: It is absolutely important. There should be horizontal and vertical alignment within the education system. We see students completing secondary school, going to university and then not being able to survive in higher education, which proves that there is a major gap. Therefore, in terms of the qualification frameworks globally, one would notice the areas that require overhauling, to make sure that flexible learning pathways are successful.



Mr Kalenga Paulus: Audience Member

Patrick Sam: Explain flexible learning pathways and whether this flexibility can become too broad. Meaning, how do you maintain something that is flexible yet still controllable and that's not too open to anything and that ensures quality?

Dr Karakhanyan: Flexible learning pathways are there to enable students to have an exit from formal education at any time of education, with the credentials that they have gained at that point, and then, using those credentials, return to HE at any given time to build upon it rather than starting again at square one.

Patrick Sam: Say I go to NUST (Namibia University of Science and Technology), for instance, and I enter technical vocational training thereafter, would there be a flexible pathway in the system or not?

Dr Karakhanyan: There should be, because the purpose of flexible learning pathways is that, at any point in time, the student is allowed to choose their own learning pathway – what they want to pursue; for example, if I were to get into HE and then transfer to vocational training – perhaps to test the waters to see which one works best. Therefore, the student completing an assessed course must be able to take that credential – the micro-credential– and evaluate it, for

them to build upon and make it portable for other qualifications or even to enter the job market.

apolitical

Question from the audience: How can we go about facilitating the depoliticisation of HE?

Dr Karakhanyan: This is a sensitive issue as so many other aspects of our lives are politicised. However, within the sectors and fields where unity and stakeholder engagement are prioritised and where people feel they have a stake in it and jointly work in concord, politics steps back. QA has even become a political tool in numerous contexts and countries, where it has become used as a tool in decision-making. The reason why the government wants to have that tool in hand is for trust and credibility. Therefore, if one builds trust in their provisions and builds a credible system, the government can step back and focus on other important things as well.



Mr Mil Kavihuha: Audience Member

Patrick Sam: Focusing on trust and credibility, where does the power lie to shift the system into this paradigm where accountability becomes mainstream?

Dr Karakhanyan: With trust and credibility – in which nothing happens or works in isolation – it is an ecosystem. There are diverse factors and diverse ingredients engaged in building trust and credibility, starting from transparency and engagement and all other aspects. The goal is to mobilise the key stakeholders to build that culture of trust and credibility. Personally, in any system, situation, or institution that I work with, I expect active engagement, because engagement

is key. Thus, with the NCHE, I would like to commend them for their active engagement. Now, we request your written feedback to the minimum standards, because if you have a stake in it, it automatically becomes useful to you.

Question from audience: Having mentioned the typology of institutions and the role research plays in teaching, do research-intensive universities or HEI have a better education quality than ordinary universities or colleges?

Dr Karakhanyan: Research-intensive universities are not necessarily good teaching and learning institutions, as everything is relative. However, if one does not do research on the subject that one owns, it becomes obsolete, because research is about uncovering the truth, the developments and keeping pace with global development trends. If research is not embedded in one's activities, then it cannot be called a HEI. All types of institutions have their own mission and if they perform to their own standards and serve student needs, then their system is working. Yet, in this system, there are examples of universities with less than 70 students engaged and where the student-to-faculty (academic staff) ratio is 2:1, which means that research is not conducted properly as faculty must outsource academic staff without expertise. Therefore, it is crucial that the bare minimum standards are introduced to avoid situations such as these.



Prof. Jairos Kangira: Audience Member

Question from audience: Borrowing an international perspective around this point of massification and democratisation of education, emphasis has been placed on the question around bare minimum standards, yet it seems that it

doesn't align with the market. So, what could be the problem in developing or articulating this policy of bare minimum standards? What needs to be done so the programme aligns with the market needs?

Dr Karakhanyan: There are multiple measurement tools in QA which take care of a diversity of issues: there is a tool that looks at institutional performance, a tool that looks at programme performance, and a tool that looks at the professional standards – which means that there are diverse sets of accreditors out there. Moreover, national regulators usually look at the institution and programme from a generic perspective, as they are not using professional standards to measure learning outcomes – they are inviting subject-specific experts to judge. However, there are professional associations which develop these professional standards as they are closely linked to the market and profession. Therefore, these professional associations or councils that are developing the standards are addressing learning outcomes and the skills and competencies required in the market, and they convert them into the standard, and thereafter the accreditation is done based on those standards.



Mr Frans Koolike: Audience Member

Question from audience: Equality and quality of education are important concepts. But, is it possible to achieve optimal realisation of that without policymakers at the forefront? Since the government plays a massive role in the funding model for HE in Namibia, how can we balance the equality and equity given that students go to where the funding is, not to what will help them in future.

Dr Karakhanyan: Funding HE is a major issue in education, and the Namibian government is one of the few governments that invest in 90% of its students. In fact, I have seldom seen other governments covering scholarships for private institutions, which the Namibian government does by providing loans to students at both public and private HEIs and deserves credit for.

However, when private providers enter the market, they must provide equal or higher quality so that students are willing to pay. Therefore, private providers are more challenged when in competition with the government, because students would rather attend a public institution where they know their fees are covered than a private institution where they are not covered – unless the private institution provides a superior education.

Additionally, there is a diversity of funds out there, as diversification of funding mechanisms for HE is one of the key issues currently discussed globally. Thus, the government must step back gradually so that the institutions take a more proactive role. This is where we mention research; if your institution begins capitalising on research then that could be a source of income or start capitalising on micro-credentials as another source. So, it is important for private institutions, and even public ones, to think about the diversification of their funding models.



Patrick Sam: On the issue of trust, how long does it take to build trust with the institutions like government in this ecosystem? For instance, if you look at the turnaround of building trust and competence, if you are a new institution, what does that period look like, entering the market as a new player?

Dr Karakhanyan: Given the competition in any country between private providers and the government, there should be a strong case for new institutions coming in. However, I have observed a lacking element in the submissions for new institutions and programmes; that is, a lack of in-depth market analysis and a lack of feasibility studies. When private providers come into the market, their feasibility is poor as many of them think that they will succeed overnight. Many of them view their work as a moneymaking business, when it is not.

Question from online audience: At what point can the accreditation process mature from programme accreditation to system accreditation?

Dr Karakhanyan: There are different types of accreditations out there, and you will notice that, globally, there is a frequent change in direction. For example, in Europe, most countries started with programme accreditation. After a couple of rounds, they moved to institutional accreditation and then back, which means that they are using a diversity of mechanisms based on the cycles of reviews. On average, one cycle of review is 5 years, after the system analysis is done. To what extent this is exercised in Namibia is unclear, but systemic somatic reviews based on accreditation results are key to revealing the core of what needs to be changed in terms of QA.

Question from online audience: Given the unplanned migration to online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has now evolved into a hybrid system, is it not critical that there should be a stand-alone standard for information technology as part of the key pillars in the value chain?

Dr Karakhanyan: I have talked about the diversification of the system and said that one size does not fit all in this context, which is why for each type of provision, one should be thinking of a new approach. We launched the international standards and guidelines last year, in which one will notice an innovative approach which is a modular approach, and through which the

diversity of providers is embraced. There are separate modules for micro-credentials, online providers, cross border providers because they are not the same. The system is diverse, and one must cater to their diverse systems, as each provider should be measured by the profile it bears and stands for.

Question from audience: Not a question, but an appreciation for the role of research, as I would like to see HEIs in Namibia factor in research on how their students are carrying out or using their competencies in the world of work. With reference coming from formal education in schools, we know how our teachers teach. Therefore, that could be a research area of interest to the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture.



Ms Edda Bohn: Audience Member

Dr Karakhanyan: I look forward to not only seeing how the teachers teach, but how the students learn, because that is a critical element, as they all learn in diverse ways, and it's only through looking at this that we can help them become lifelong learners.

Question from audience: The introduction of minimum standards will have far-reaching implications for HEIs. I have also noticed that several private institutions are registering as universities on paper. So, should we introduce these minimum standards, these institutions might not qualify to be certified as

universities and might therefore be downgraded. Will this not have far-reaching implications for the regulators in terms of changing the culture?

Dr Karakhanyan: Before we developed the minimum standards, we conducted research and analysis on this. We found that there are three major universities in Namibia which are capturing 77% of students. So, we are judging based on the impact of the students, not the impact of the university. Thus, the minimum standards should have minimum impact on students, as 77% are secure. However, those institutions that do not meet the minimum standards will not close down immediately, as there will be a transition phase for the system to adjust to the typology being introduced. However, if they are unable to meet minimum standards in the transition period, then it is an indication that they must change their status as HEI.



Dr Raimo Naanda, Audience Member

Vote of Thanks

The Vice-Chairperson of the NCHE, Dr Francine N. Keendjele acknowledged that the deliberations had been enlightening and enriching. She acknowledged the NCHE Secretariat's role in organising the 11th Public Lecture. Extensive and profound appreciation was conveyed to the presenter, Dr Susanna Karakhanyan, for agreeing to share her expertise on the topic and for her well-researched and thought-provoking presentation. Similarly, her selfless attitude, insight, and energy have shaped this process of redefining the draft minimum quality standards for the higher education system in Namibia.



Special appreciation was given to Dr Van Kent, for sounding the welcome remarks on behalf of the line Ministry, for providing critical insights, and for sharing the imperatives of the MHETI's mandate to oversee and ensure the development and coordination of quality higher education in Namibia. She emphasised that the Executive Director reminded the public of the seriousness and urgency of the task at hand. Moreover, the Chairperson of the NCHE was acknowledged for the insightful remarks he presented regarding the topic discussed and the related imperatives.

A special word of appreciation was given to the Namibian government institutions, professional associations, academic institutions, international sister agencies in higher education quality assurance, students, the audience, and the public for accompanying the NCHE in this process and, particularly, for participating in the public lecture.

The moderator was recognised and thanked for the insightful analysis of the subject and the thought-provoking questions. The facilitation skills he demonstrated surely enhanced the understanding and relevance of the topic to the development of quality education sector in the country. The audiences that had the opportunity to participate through posing questions or comments was thanked for adding value to the deliberations and indeed contributed to the body of knowledge of the subject.

Lastly, gratitude was extended to the media for keeping the public informed about the important public lecture and further disseminating the highlights emanating from the public lecture to promote public discussion. To the entire audience, physical and online, it was stated that the lecture affirms NCHE's conviction in the potential of public lectures to share, spread and advance knowledge, especially on matters relating to education in general and education quality assurance in particular. NCHE hopes to meet all participants and stakeholders as it will continue to engage multiple stakeholders at the upcoming 12th NCHE public lecture.

Appendix A: Media Advert



11TH PUBLIC LECTURE

**“Enhancing Higher Education System Performance
and Efficiency Through Minimum Standards”**

DATE: 09 MARCH 2023
TIME: 18H00
VENUE: THURINGERHOF HOTEL
C/o Independence Avenue &
Prof. Mburumba Kerina Street



Keynote Speaker
Dr Susanna Karakhanyan

Former President of the International Network for
Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)
and co-author of the International Standards and Guidelines
for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education.

Also Available on Zoom Platform
Meeting ID: 882 3289 2502 • Passcode: 494102

Appendix B: Programme

11th PUBLIC LECTURE PROGRAMME

THEME:

“Enhancing higher education system performance and efficiency through minimum standards”

Date: 09 March 2023
Time: 18h00, Local Time
Venue: Thuringerhof Hotel & Virtual
Mode: Hybrid
Moderator: Mr Patrick Sam

Time	Activity	Presenter
17:30	Arrival & registration	NCHE Secretariat
18h00	Welcoming remarks	Dr Alfred van Kent
18h10	Remarks	Prof Samuel John
18h30	Keynote presentation	Dr Susanna Yu. Karakhanyan
19h15	Discussions	Keynote presenter assisted by Moderator
19h50	Concluding remarks	Keynote presenter
20h00	Vote of thanks	Dr Francine N. Keendjele

Appendix C: Biography of Keynote Speaker



Susanna Karakhanyan, PhD

Nationality: Armenian

Citizenship: Armenian

Residence: The United Arab Emirates

Currently, Dr Karakhanyan is employed by the Abu Dhabi Government as a Higher Education Policy and Regulation Director at the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge in the United Arab Emirates. She is also the Immediate Past President of the *International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education* (INQAAHE), which is a global umbrella network of tertiary education quality assurance providers.

INQAAHE brings together more than 350 members worldwide. She consults governments on policymaking, governance as well as external and internal QA systems in a diversity of contexts globally.

Dr Karakhanyan's expertise evolves around tertiary education in general and policymaking, governance, and quality assurance in particular. Her expertise has been widely sought after by a diversity of systems and cultures. She has worked with around 35 governments, authored, and delivered capacity-building events and external reviews of governance structures, legal and policy frameworks, and QA systems worldwide. She has led a variety of projects under the auspices of the Council of Europe, UNESCO, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Open Society Institute, and IREX, to name but a few. All the projects address higher education reforms in general and a diversity of aspects in legal and policy frameworks, policymaking, governance, and quality assurance, in particular. Her service has been acknowledged in a diversity of contexts and systems globally.

Dr Karakhanyan holds an M.S. Ed in Educational Administration/Leadership from the University of Pennsylvania, the USA and a PhD in Social Sciences from Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Her research interests focus on higher education governance and administration, reforms, policymaking, policy diffusion and transfer, and external and internal quality assurance. Her research background has helped her tremendously in the establishment of new and evaluation/review of existing tertiary education systems in a diversity of contexts at the global level.

Appendix D: List of Participants

No.	Name of attendee	Name of institution
Physical Attendees		
1.	Mitiri Tjazamo	Ondjou Investment cc
2.	Raimo Naanda	MHETI
3.	Max Katshuna	Juxtapose
4.	David Johannes	Juxtapose
5.	Ronel Rogerio	Juxtapose
6.	Majumi Gondwe	Juxtapose
7.	Waltrud Godwe	Juxtapose
8.	Austin Uche	Sedis
9.	Hangula Victoria	NCHE
10.	Indileni Mweutota	NQA
11.	Prof Jarius Kangira	UNAM
12.	Ndilimeke Ndivaye	Limkokwing
13.	Bertha Njembo	NCHE
14.	Hannu Shipena	NCHE
15.	J. Mwashife	Limkokwing
16.	Frans Koolike	Public member
17.	Mil Kavihuha	TUN
18.	Rochelle Januarie	NCHE
19.	Helvi N. Samuel	PSCS
20.	Benhard Mbaeva	NUST
21.	W. Hange	Brilliant ED Center
22.	G. Kaperu	MHETI
23.	Samuel John	NCHE
24.	Harmoni Beukes	NQA
25.	Chris Shatona	Improvement Network
26.	Edda Bohn	MoEAC
27.	Asnath k Kaperu	Public member
28.	Ellis Tjiueza	Tiko Investment
29.	Fiina Vatuva	NUST
30.	David Anghuwo	MoEAC
31.	Ngepathimo Kadhila	UNAM
32.	Neville U. Uateza	WVTC
33.	Otja Tjipetekera	NSA
34.	Krishn Capp	COTA
35.	T. Kahuika	MICT
36.	Kasivi Fernando	Daydream Institute
37.	Joubert Tausama	NIPAM
38.	Cecil Moller	No Plot Productions
39.	Kalenga Paulus	Daydream Institute
40.	Ignatius	DDI
41.	Lloyd Bock	REAL LDC/ UNAM
42.	Fenni Nghikevali	ICAN
43.	S. Robe	NUST

44.	Elizabeth Kiangi	Triumphant College
45.	Linea Andreas	Triumphant College
46.	Helena Neema	NANSO
47.	Edward Hategekimana	NCHE
48.	Prof William Heuva	North-West University
49.	Esther Johannes	Public member
50.	Francine Keendjele	NCHE
51.	Sylvia Demas	NCHE
Virtual Attendees		
52.	Victoria Siphiwe Mamvura	
53.	Karabo Baipidi	

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CONTACTS

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